HARUN AL RASHID

THE CITY OF BAGHDAD IN FLOOD

*(From a 15th Century Persian MS.
By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)*

HARUN AL RASHID

BY

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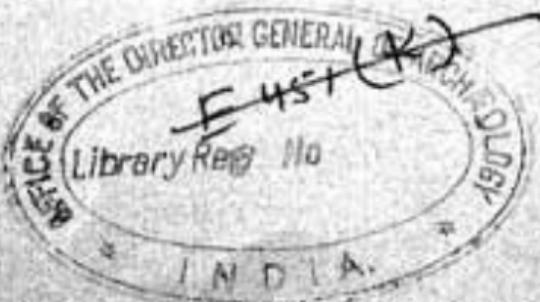
'THE EMPTY QUARTER' ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

TO MY SECOND DAUGHTER,

DORA PATRICIA CARDEW PHILBY,

BORN ON NOVEMBER 7TH, 1921,

AT BAGHDAD, ON THE SITE OF THE CELEBRATED NIDHAMIYA COLLEGE, NEAR THE KALWADHA GATE, WHERE THE LAST OF THE 'ABBASID CALIFS SURRENDERED TO THE MONGOL CONQUEROR, HULAGU KHAN, ON JANUARY 27TH, 1258 A.D.

But for my little girls, like chicks,
Of sand-grouse huddled side by side,
I would wander freely, roaming
Over the earth so far and wide.

Hittan ibn al Mu'alli.
(? 8th century, A.D.)

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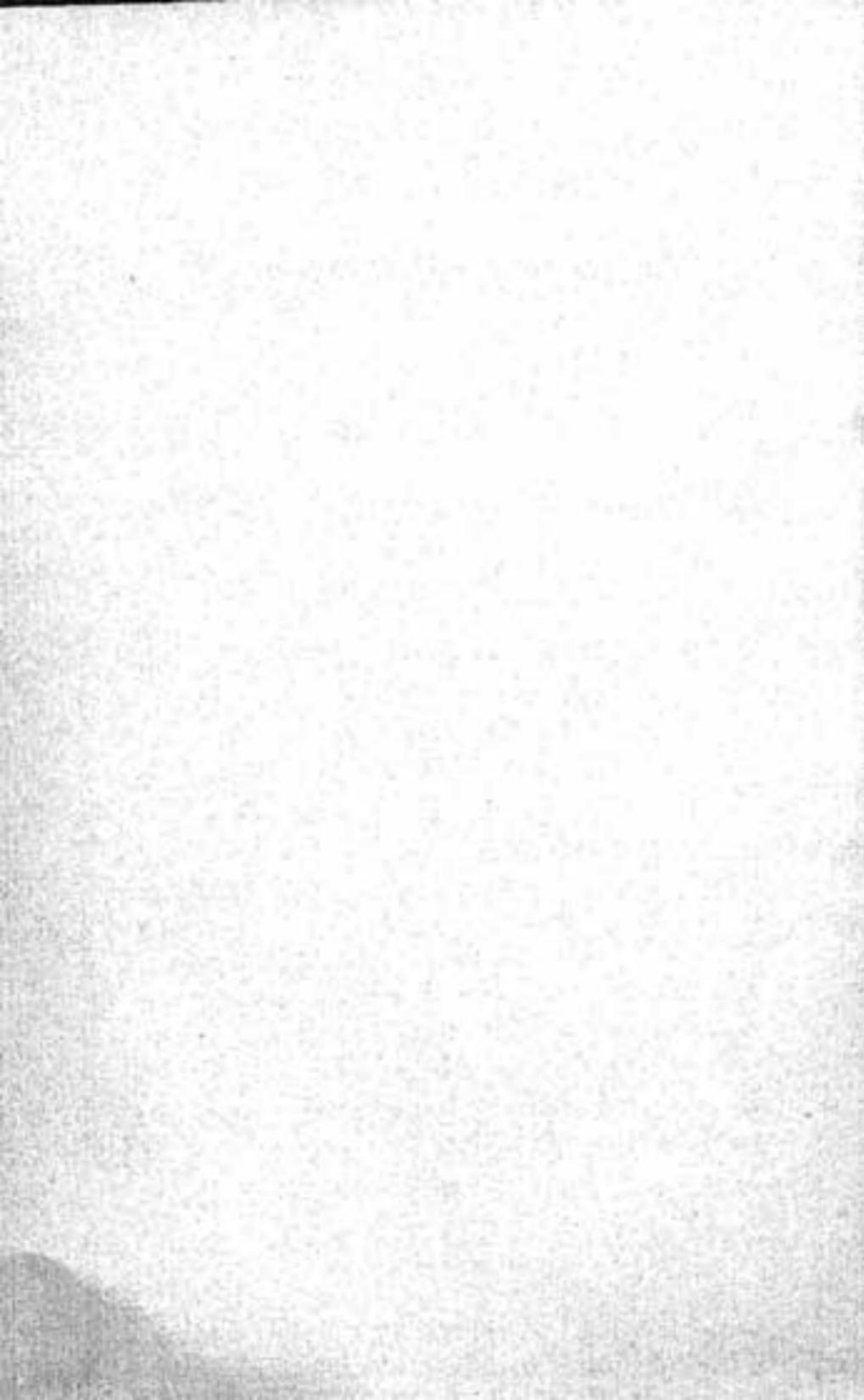
PREFACE

The story of Harun al Rashid, Calif of Baghdad, has long been an integral part of the intellectual heritage of humanity. In language carefully graduated to suit the various stages of our diminishing innocence, we learn in childhood and adolescence something of the history of medieval Arabia as naturally and inevitably as we study the legend of the Jews as set forth in the Old Testament, the story of ancient Greece and Rome as taught in their 'dead' languages, and the New Testament record of the beginnings of Christianity. The liberal education, on which we pride ourselves, knows no bounds of racial or religious prejudice and spreads its net wide to catch the fish or fowl that feed our young. Yet when we go to school, we leave Grimm and Hans Andersen behind us in the nursery, and gradually we forget that 'there were in days of yore and in ages and times long gone before, in the City of Baghdad, the Abode of Peace, a Caliph Harun al Rashid hight, who had cup-companions and tale-tellers to entertain him by

night.'[1] Arabia drops out of the educational curriculum and, though Baghdad is probably more familiar to the present generation than it ever was to its predecessors, the glamour of the 'Arabian Nights' still tends to distract popular attention from the sober record of the 'Days of the Arabs.'

Rightly or wrongly—and thanks mainly to the celebrated story just mentioned—Harun al Rashid has caught the eye of posterity, to be accepted as the personification of all that was typical and splendid in an Empire that at one time—though not actually in his time—extended from the Pamirs to the Pyrenees, from the Indus to the Atlantic. It is strange, therefore, that the historians should on the whole have neglected him as an individual and been content to consider him as a member of various important historical groups rather than as an outstanding actor on the stage of his day. This may, to some extent, be the result of a natural reaction against the bias of the 'Arabian Nights' saga ; but the fact remains that, so far as I know, E. H. Palmer alone has given us a full-length portrait of the Calif in his *The Caliph*

[1] Sir Richard Burton's Translation : *Supplemental (Arabian) Nights*, Benares edition, 1886, vol. ii. p. 67.

Haroun al Raschid. Others—and their name is legion—have dealt with him fully and faithfully enough in works of a wider scope embracing the complete record of the 'Abbasid Califs or the annals of the Califate as a whole. There is, therefore, room enough for a detailed and critical monograph on Harun, and we may look forward with interest to the comprehensive record of his reign promised us (in Arabic) by Dr. Ahmad Farid Rifa'i for the not distant future. His work on the age of Mamun, published in 1927 under the title *'Asr al Mamun*, has indeed been of the greatest value to me in preparing this treatise on that Calif's father.

The present volume is not, and does not pretend to be, an exhaustive essay on the subject. It is rather a sketch or impression, designed to convey to the man in the street a picture of a period, grouped round its actual or reputed central figure, with just enough historical detail to enable him to see it in its proper relation to the kaleidoscope of human evolution, of which it forms a part. The scope of this work has ruled out any idea of original research—the time allowed me for its preparation would alone have made anything of that kind impossible—and I have not made any

special effort to dig anew in the fully-exploited mines of information represented by the works of Tabari, Ibn al Athir, Ibn Khaldun and others. The metal extracted from their rich ores has been worked into shape often enough to make the general lines of the story familiar to the student ; and I have been content for the most part to rely on secondary sources of relatively modern date from Gibbon down to our own times. At the same time I have eschewed the temptation of indenting on the 'Arabian Nights' for material, and have not consciously been influenced by the sidelights on actual history projected from its pages. And, finally, I have not allowed my imagination to run riot among the familiar scenes of a modern Arabian court—the court indeed of a Calif in all but name, with enough of the savour of the Middle Ages about it, in spite of its motor cars and wireless telegraphy, to illuminate the actions and motives of princes and peoples more than a thousand years ago.

Apart from the work of Dr. Rifa'i already mentioned, I have made full use of the comprehensive survey of Islamic history to the end of the 'Abbasid period contained in the recently published three volumes of the Univer-

sity lectures (in Arabic) of the late Professor Muhammad Bey al Khudhri of Cairo. Neither of these authors has broken anything in the nature of new ground, and neither of them is altogether free from palpable errors; while both have treated their subject on somewhat conventional lines. Nevertheless they seem to provide all that is necessary for the student who would have a grasp of the essential facts and events of the 'Abbasid epoch. Another and very much earlier Arabic source on which I have drawn is the *Kitab al Fakhri* of Ibn Tiqtaqa, compiled in the first year of the fourteenth century by one who had been in Baghdad at the time of the Mongol invasion and capture of the city.

As for European compilations to which I have referred in the preparation of this volume, I have already mentioned Gibbon. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* and H. G. Wells, in his *Outline of History*, may be bracketed with the *Decline and Fall* as contributors of much recondite and valuable material necessary to the painting of a suitable background for my hero; while for more specific information or views I have gone to such standard works as Sir William Muir's *The Califate*, G. Le Strange's *Baghdad under the 'Abbasid Califate*, and Cl. Huart's *Histoire des*

Arabes, while I have found lighter but none the less useful matter in *A Baghdad Chronicle*, by Reuben Levy, as well as in other places too numerous to mention. And, last but not least, I have of course consulted Professor R. A. Nicholson's *Literary History of the Arabs*.

The preparation of this essay has provided me with an opportunity of refreshing my memory of the details of a picture which, by very reason of its having been the background as it were of my own life for a quarter of a century, had become too familiar to be noticed. The pleasure of renewing acquaintance with the old landmarks in an effort to interpret for the benefit of others their significance in the history of the Arabs suggests a hope that these pages may in their turn inspire some fresher mind to the deeper study, which alone can produce what is still lacking in English literature—a worthy work on the most famous of the Califs of Baghdad.

In conclusion, I have as usual to acknowledge with gratitude the help of my wife, who undertook all the secretarial work connected with this volume and also prepared the index.

H. St. J. B. P.

MECCA, *February* 1933.

I

THE LIGHT THAT FAILED

When 'Ali, the fourth and last of the 'Orthodox Califs,' marched out of Madina in October, 656 A.D., to face a rebel gathering on the borders of 'Iraq, a man in the street plucked at his bridle with a warning. 'Stay!' he cried. 'If thou goest forth from hence, the government will depart from this city never more to return.'[1] Madina, the city of the Prophet, was the proud metropolis of an Empire which had been won in a single generation by the might of the Word and the Sword. The virility and the eloquence of the desert, whose northern fringe had already produced the two great religions of the Jews and the Christians, had again taken the world by storm. And the 'City Illumined' stood forth, as it were a torch to guide men through the darkness of the Middle Ages. It was typical —as Haïl and Riyadh were to become a thou-

[1] Muir, p. 253.

sand years later—of all the vigour and virtue of Arabia, which might indeed have continued to rule much of the world for years to come if 'Ali had heeded the words of a madman. He would seem, however, to have made up his mind already to transfer the seat of his government to Kufa on the banks of the Euphrates. And thus, both by his action and his intentions, he surrendered the birthright not of Madina only, but of Arabia herself, which would henceforth count only as a province of her daughter Empire. 'Yaman is the cradle and 'Iraq the grave of the Arabs.'

'Ali never returned to Madina. His son, Hasan, only did so after abdication of the Califate, to perish ignobly in due course at the hands of a jealous wife or concubine. The star of the Prophet's family seemed indeed to have set for ever; and the vigorous Mu'awiya, scion of a collateral branch of the Prophet's clan, ruled unchallenged, while none regretted the easy and inglorious eclipse of 'Ali and his brood. Yet the Umaiyid dynasty was doomed to a speedy downfall, and 'Ali destined to immortality by the hazard of an infamous massacre, in which perished

Husain, his second son, with nearly a score of the Prophet's descendants. A thrill of horror bristled through Islam; and it was Madina, which in life he had deserted, that cherished the remnants of 'Ali's house, to lay the foundations of a faction which for nearly thirteen centuries has riven the lute of Islam, and which from the very beginning challenged, and triumphantly challenged, the supremacy of Arabia.

Yazid and his successors never fully recovered from the shock of the ghastly victory at Karbala in 680 A.D., and, though the dynasty maintained its position in the Empire for two generations after that event, the mysterious undercurrent of sedition ran in an ever-deepening channel, whose surface was only disturbed by occasional, and generally harmless, ripples. The Umaiyid clan produced a sufficiency of able rulers to bridge intervals of ineptitude; and in Syria they found support for their imperial activities both in a solid phalanx of the genuine tribal elements of Arabia and in the tradition of disciplined citizenship inherited by their non-Arab subjects from the Roman Empire. Mu'awiya

and his successors stood, at any rate at the beginning, for the Arab spirit in the Empire of Islam; but the cause of 'Ali prospered in the turbulent chaos of 'Iraq, and, broadening imperceptibly into a Hashimite formula which excluded the Umaiyid house while leaving the field open to all the descendants of the Prophet's grandfather, 'Abdul Muttalib, son of Hashim, won favour in the provinces which had known and appreciated the glories of the Persian monarchy.

Slowly but surely the endemic Persian doctrine of divine right was reborn in conflict with the democratic tradition of Arabia, while Islam itself provided in the person and house of the 'Lord of Mankind' an admirable focus for the veneration of far-flung peoples and countries, which had accepted the religion but never assimilated the politics of the desert. In many respects the Umaiyid era was the most glorious in the annals of Islam and the Arab Empire, which was rapidly expanded to include India in the East and Spain to the West; but the initial error of 'Ali and the tragedy of Karbala combined to foreshadow the day of foreign supremacy.

Muslim sentiment, as it developed during the century following the death of Muhammad, tended to confer on the Prophet's family a status and privilege which he himself had not only never envisaged but had implicitly waived by a characteristically democratic gesture. 'Ali—his first cousin and adopted son, his ever-loyal lieutenant and his daughter's husband—had undoubtedly expected the reversion of his mantle ; but the Prophet, in his last moments, had charged Abu Bakr to lead the prayers, and, by investing him thus with the chief function of the head of the State, had clearly marked him out as his successor. His election, after a moment of doubt, followed as a matter of course ; and we may perhaps trace back to this last act of the dying Prophet both the failure of Arabia to maintain the hegemony of the Empire and the ultimate failure of Islam itself to hold together as an imperial unit. It is strange indeed that one who legislated so minutely for every circumstance of public and private life should have omitted to make clear beyond any possibility of doubt or question his own idea of the ideal form of government for the Islamic community

and of the method to be adopted for regulating the succession to the presidency of the commonwealth.

The architect of a social structure so rigid that it has incurred the reasoned censure of a progressive world, overweeningly proud of its material civilisation, omitted to provide a steel frame for its central power-house. Apart from his gesture in favour of Abu Bakr, he left its design to the good sense of posterity, and *hinc illae lacrimae!* Islam has ever suffered from a weakness at the centre, and it is reasonable to believe that much of the history of a millennium would have been written very differently if the Prophet himself had declared categorically either for a republican system or for the continuance of his own line in the chief office of the State. In choosing Abu Bakr he selected the man most capable of wielding the sceptre he bequeathed to him ; but he left to future generations a burden beyond their capacity to bear effectively. And chaos soon ensued.

Abu Bakr nominated 'Umar to succeed him —a wise and successful choice. But 'Umar himself nominated electors to choose his successor

when the time should come ; and their choice was disastrous. 'Uthman was assassinated and 'Ali placed on the throne by his destroyers. With wisdom and patience he might even now have stabilised the succession in the house of the Prophet for ever, but folly brought him down before a more vigorous rival, who succeeded in founding a dynasty and setting an example which has held the field until our own times at the expense of the democratic system. Revolutions and intrigues, it is true, disturbed the sequence of dynasties ; but each dynasty followed the example of Mu'awiya rather than the method of the Prophet. The first Umaiyid Calif caused allegiance to be sworn by his subjects to his son as heir-apparent, in token of his acknowledged right to succeed to the Califate itself in due course. An appearance of stability at the centre was thus secured to the general advantage ; but some of the later Umaiyids and of the 'Abbasids after them would in due course, and with unfortunate results, attempt to mortgage the loyalty of their adherents in advance for more than one generation. In the event democracy went by the board, and dynastic rule

has been the fashion in Islam—tempered only by a formal manifestation of public approval at the accession of each new ruler.

Of more moment and interest at this stage, however, was the incipient conflict between Arabia and the outlying provinces for the hegemony of the Empire. 'Ali, as we have seen, betrayed the Arab cause—unwittingly—by leaving Madina. Harassed on the one hand by Mu'awiya's rebellious attitude in Syria and on the other by a rival menace to the rich province of 'Iraq, he sought to turn the tables on Damascus by adopting Kufa as his capital. He might have reversed the process with results ultimately similar. He might, however, have held both provinces by remaining at Madina, which at least involved no complication of parochial rivalries and jealousies. The Prophet's city had a *cachet* which neither Syria nor 'Iraq could match. But the die was cast, and Damascus for the moment triumphed over Kufa. In due course the tables would be turned on Syria by the 'Abbasid revolution, but the 'Abbasids would themselves search 'Iraq in vain for a capital. Kufa would soon be deserted for Anbar ; and

Anbar would in turn be discarded for—Baghdad! But Baghdad was yet unborn, and its conception was a masterstroke of genius. Yet this light too failed all too soon like that of the 'City Illumined.' Only the lamp remained—the city of Mansur—to survive into our own time and to renew in the twentieth century the conflict between 'Iraq and Arabia for the hegemony of an Empire in the making—an Empire smaller and more compact than that of the early Califs, but an Empire none the less, which needs to-day no less than it needed then the unity of spirit which is the only sure foundation of strength. But history repeats itself to-day in the struggle of an Arabian dynasty, self-contained, self-sufficient and independent, with another based on the prestige of descent from the Prophet himself but relying on the support of foreign advisers and foreign arms like the 'Abbasids of old, who looked east for the light which now comes from the west. The conflict begun by 'Ali is not yet over, and Arabia still seeks her place in the sun. The question left in suspense by Muhammad remains unanswered. Mecca, the capital of Islam, may yet become

the capital of the Arabs. And the chief office of the State is still open—between a descendant of the Prophet and the greatest of the Arabs. But it is as clear now as it was thirteen centuries ago that the sole hope of the Arabs lies in their ability to unite, to concentrate and to be independent.

II

THE SETTING OF THE STAGE

Mansur, the second of the 'Abbasid Califs, made himself and his new city symbols of unity and concentration but scarcely of independence. His bloodthirsty younger brother, the first Calif of his clan, had indeed united the jarring races of the Islamic Empire under the black flag of his house, but he had owed too much to foreign troops and foreign brains. Mansur was conscious of them, but the new capital was largely his own both in plan and execution. In defiance of his foreign advisers, he tampered with Ctesiphon but soon discovered his mistake. Again, in defiance of his foreign advisers, he left the ruins of Chosroes to challenge comparison with his own achievement; and posterity has given the verdict in favour of the older civilisation. But the crux of the situation lay in the presence of foreign advisers. Neither Mansur himself nor his suc-

cessors could do without them; and years later Harun would look out across the Tigris from the windows of his palace to realise wistfully that the real palace and the real ruler of his Empire were over there on the opposite bank. And even so, twelve centuries later—when the power of the East had gone West and the weakness of the West had settled on the East—a new King in Baghdad would look out across the river to the mansion of a foreign adviser on its right bank and would recognise that the pomp and circumstance of his own situation was but as a halo against the background of the setting sun.

A colossal lancer pranced upon the central dome of the Calif's palace in the centre of his triple-walled city, challenging the world. But the 'Golden Gate' opened freely to ministers and minions from foreign parts, while the rugged shaikhs of Arabia stood without, seeking admission to the Calif's presence and chafing at the new manners. They soon learned that the business of the State was transacted on the other side of the river while the Commander of the Faithful devoted his attention to the arts and sciences—and to women. Baghdad grew

apace as the world poured out its talents at her feet. Her magnificence and munificence were justly famed until the thronging population outgrew the capacity of Mansur's foundation and spread out, up and down both banks of the Tigris, leaving the Calif's walls in peace to guard their precious treasure. It was those walls that perished first—when the jewel within them ceased to be worth guarding—and none can trace to-day in the straggling wards of Karkh the triple circle that bore them up. The rest survived, a pulsing hive of human industry, that grew up unplanned but luxuriantly round the rotting carcase of the 'Abbasid Califate. All that was splendid is gone, but the site remains to vindicate the genius of Mansur.

Yet modern Baghdad, as we know it to-day, is but a shadow of its medieval self. Mansur had designed and built his own Round City; not long afterwards, at the suggestion of a foreign envoy, he had turned out its civilian and commercial population, assigning to it the land lying astride the canals to the south for their chaffering and industry; and on the east side of the river he had set up a military

camp round a palace built for the accommodation of his heir-apparent. He was, therefore, the founder not only of the 'Round City,' but also of the greater Baghdad which survived the ruins of his Capitol. The Round City, wrecked by the first of many sieges only half a century after its foundation, never recovered from the shock and became a mere district of the metropolis. Its mosque, somewhat cavalierly treated by its founder in the interests of his palace, was extended in due course at the expense of the latter. The triple wall crumbled into the mud from which it was made, leaving only the more solid gateways to mark points on its circumference. And the greater Baghdad, remaining a capital city for five centuries and becoming thereafter the centre of a provincial administration—to endure into our own times as such and to become then once more the capital of a kingdom—was left to grow up vicariously, expanding and contracting according to the needs of the times, but on the whole dwindling to what it was when the Great War opened for it the new chapter of to-day and to-morrow.

The site was too good to perish ; the avail-

able material was too poor to endure; while the terrain, far and wide on both banks of the river, was such as to favour new construction rather than repairs. Ruins were left to encumber their abandoned sites and to crumble into dust and under the frequent assaults of floods and enemies, while virgin ground was occupied and built over in their place. The centres of life and business, of pomp and government, shifted bewilderingly from north to south, from west to east, clinging to the river on both sides. In later times the now great city of Kadhimain grew up out of a great cemetery. Karkh, reduced in size and concentrated on the west bank of the river, remains to this day. And on the east bank the modern town occupies the virgin ground extending from the southern extremity of the eastern city, as it was in the days of Mansur and his successors down to his great-grandson Mamun.

Eastern Baghdad soon displaced the western city as the centre of the whole; and so it has remained till to-day, when we see it again expanding southwards over the garden suburb of Alwiya to Hunaidi and northwards towards

Mu'adhdham to revive once more the earliest glories of the 'Abbasid period. The western city is also reviving and expanding from the undefeated suburb of Karkh outwards to the railway colony and upwards along the river towards Kadhimain. Under modern conditions Baghdad may indeed become as great as ever it was, but little is left of that which delighted the eyes and heart of Harun's grandfather.

We are now, however, only concerned to know or imagine the scene as it was, say, during the period of seventy years between the foundation of the Round City in 763 A.D. and the death of Mamun in 833—a period which is generally and perhaps justly regarded as the most glorious chapter in the history of Islam. The centre of the stage was of course the Round City itself, conceived and executed as a single work on a definite plan. The inner wall, circular and some 2000 yards in diameter, contained the headquarters of the central government of the Empire—the Calif's palace in the middle with the mosque built by its side to conform to its alignment rather than to the true bearing of Mecca ; and around them,

sed longo intervallo for strategic reasons, the palaces built to house the numerous children of the Calif and their almost equally numerous mothers ; the offices of the various departments of State ; and the barracks and stables of the Calif's cavalry. Outside this wall, and between it and the middle or main wall, the narrow circular space, divided into four quadrants by the roads giving access to the centre through the four main gates, resided the merchants and craftsmen, each kind or guild in its own area, forming the civil population. And finally, the similar circular space between the middle and outer walls was reserved for the defence of the citadel, being left unoccupied to provide ample room for the movement of the guardian troops from point to point of the vast circumference.

Such was the kernel of Mansur's Baghdad. It may be assumed that a vicarious commercial population soon settled down outside the limits of the great *enceinte*, where the available space could never have been sufficient to accommodate the huge population attracted for one reason or another to the capital. Apart from such casual populating of the outer spaces,

we know that Mansur distributed fiefs to his generals and other persons of importance in the lands round the walls about the numerous canals, which carried the waters of the Euphrates into the sister river after satisfying the irrigational and other needs of the city. Each fief developed naturally enough into a hamlet or village, which, coalescing in the course of time with similar neighbours, developed into suburbs until a suburban ring encircled the Round City and put forth narrow spokes, as of a wheel, along the flanks of the main outgoing thoroughfares—and particularly along the Kufa or pilgrim road, which soon carried an enormous extension of Karkh to the southward. On the north, between a sandy tract of desert and the river, the great cemetery sprawled over a vast area with its famous shrines—of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, of the two Imams who gave their name to Kadhimain, and of the illustrious queen Zubaida herself. And finally, beyond the river to the east, with no fewer than three bridges of boats to bind the two sides into a single whole, lay the nucleus of Eastern Baghdad, the future superseder of Mansur's own city—the suburb of Rusafa,

born of Mahdi's palace and camp, with the outlying quarters of Shammasiya and Mukharrim.

Such was the Baghdad of Mansur and his immediate successors—and it is perhaps only necessary to mention the fact that Mansur, sensing doubtless the isolation imposed on him by the circumstances of the Round City, built for himself another palace outside its walls on a promontory facing Rusafa across the river, which he surrounded with a noble garden and named the 'Mansion of Paradise.' He did not, however, survive long to enjoy the delights of this earthly heaven, for in the very year of its completion (775 A.D.) he set out to perform the pilgrimage at Mecca and died within sight almost of the holy city. According to one account he fell from his horse and broke his neck on the steep slope leading down into the Meccan valley from the pass of Ri' al Hujul; while another story places his tomb near that of the Prophet's wife Maimuna, some seven or eight miles out on the pilgrim road. In either case he died full of years—he was nearly seventy—and honour; and it is recorded of him that, having a presentiment of his approaching

end before he left 'Iraq, he had taken the precaution of warning his son and successor, Mahdi, against the temptation to neglect his own Round City in favour of its eastern suburb. Mahdi, dutifully enough, made the western city his headquarters and apparently resided at the 'Golden Gate' itself, though he also retained the Rusafa mansion of the eastern bank in frequent use. Harun affected the 'Mansion of Paradise' as his residence, at any rate till he migrated to Raqqa on the upper Euphrates, while his son, Amin, returned to the 'golden palace,' to perish before long in the defence of the triple-walled city against his brother. And then, at last, Mamun transferred his headquarters to the eastern bank, where he occupied the Barmecide mansion, afterwards called the Hasani palace, to celebrate his accession.

There, for a brief period, the glory of the 'Abbasid Califate shone out again as in the early days; but the end was near and, with the death of Mamun, Baghdad lost for ever its place and prestige as the mistress of the Eastern Empire. For half a century, indeed, Samarra actually displaced it as the nominal

capital, but, even when the Califs returned to reside at Baghdad for the next four centuries, the Califate had lost its power and its representatives were but puppets or prisoners in foreign hands.

III

ENTER HARUN

Harun and Baghdad were conceived in the same year ; and the babe destined to undying fame was born in 763 A.D. at Raiy near the modern capital of Persia, some 500 miles from the new-born citadel of his grandfather, which would be the scene of his own magnificence and the centre of his legend. His father, Mahdi, then a young man of twenty, had in 758 been sent by Mansur, in company with a considerable force under the actual command of Ibn Khuzaima, to deal with rebellions on the north-eastern confines of the Empire. With only a brief visit to Kufa, still the capital of the Califate, in 761 he appears to have spent the next ten years in Persia. And it was in or about the year 759 that, after crushing the rebellious governor of Tabaristan, he had annexed from the latter's household two maidens, one of whom, named Khaizaran,

gave birth in the following years to two boys and the other to a girl. The eldest of these three children was the future Calif Hadi, the second Harun himself, and the girl 'Abbasa. And at about the same time as Harun, and in the same place, was born a son, named Fadhl, to Yahya ibn Barmak, who now makes his first appearance on the stage as an official on the staff of the heir-apparent during the latter's campaigns in Persia, while his father, Khalid, occupied a position of trust in the service of the Calif himself.

Thus did blind destiny forge the links of a tragic chain. The blood of his brother and half-sister and that of two generations of his foster-brother's family—for in token of their mutual love the two mothers were wont to exchange the infants at their breasts each for other—would stain the escutcheon of Harun and leave an indelible, inexplicable blot on one of the brightest pages of the world's history.

It was indeed a strange world then of strife and darkness as of the primeval chaos, with here and there a meteor streaking through the dim galaxies of humanity with a brilliance

and mobility that shock and astonish us in the modern world of mechanised speed and stagnant warfare. Scarce a generation had passed since the lapping tide of Islam had reached its furthest limits east and west and had begun to ebb. At the beginning of the century, whose middle course was to witness the birth of Baghdad and Harun, the Saracens had overspread France and, with a little more luck or momentum, might have imposed their faith on the barbarians of central Europe and island Britain. But the luck had changed. The momentum was lacking. And the primitive jealousies of the Arabian desert asserted themselves in a host that had borne the brunt of a seven-days' battle with the massed chivalry of the Franks.

Charles Martel, illegitimate son of the elder Pepin, duke of the Franks and progenitor of a line of kings, rested victorious on the battlefield of Poitiers, while the Moors slunk away beyond the barrier of the Pyrenees, never to recross them. Spain would for some centuries remain the furthest outpost of Islam towards the west ; but it had already drifted irrevocably out of the orbit of the Eastern

Califate, and Africa would soon follow its example, centring on Fez and Qairawan. The collapse of the Umaiyids of Damascus in 750 A.D. had inaugurated the era of rival or separate Califates. Never more would there be unity in Islam, but the 'Abbasid Califs, territorially circumscribed from the beginning, would nevertheless gain more than had been lost in the concentration of their authority in an East still large enough, strong enough, and grand enough to challenge comparison with the West.

Meanwhile Christendom, saved by a miracle from the faith and the rule of the Saracens, proceeded to demonstrate the weakness of the nominal Empire whose capital was Constantinople, and whose lord was Leo the Isaurian—an usurper of the purple who, nevertheless, founded a dynasty and gained fame for the introduction into Christendom of a new schism based on an ancient theme. When Charles Martel saved Europe for Christianity on the field of Poitiers in 732, the battle of the second commandment was already at its height throughout the vast extent of the Roman Empire. Christendom

was divided from top to bottom on an issue which the Prophet of Islam had wisely settled for ever in a manner that allowed of no compromise, though it has perhaps been productive of some inconvenience in Islamic countries since the discovery of photography and other innocent methods of making the still or moving 'likeness of any form that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.'

We are not here concerned with the squabbles of Christendom on this vital issue of the images except in so far that the temporary triumph of the Iconoclasts—due rather to the masterful virility of Leo and his son Constantine V than, to any deep feeling of resentment against the pictorial representation of their saints among the people—and its provocative proclamation by 338 bishops at the great synod of 754 had repercussions that changed the face of a world which was now to come into close contact, diplomatic or military, with the 'Abbasid Califs. From Rome the Pope, Gregory II, hurled abuse and invective at his distant sovereign without going far enough to satisfy the outraged peoples of Italy, who clung to

their images but sought their independence. The Lombards threatened Rome in its disordered nakedness, and Gregory's successor went forth to seek the aid of France in the city's extremity. Pepin, nothing loth, came down upon the Lombards to chastise them. And twenty years later, in 774, Pepin's son came down not only to chastise them once more for their renewed contumacy, but to become in due course Emperor of the West.

It was not indeed till 800 A.D. that Charlemagne became in name what he had been in fact for the previous quarter of a century. But, Islam having disintegrated into three parts in the middle of the eighth century as the result of Charles Martel's victory at Poitiers and the collapse of the Umaiyid Califate, the loose-knit body of Christendom had followed its example by splitting into two empires in the year preceding the death of Mansur and the accession of Harun's father to the throne of the Eastern Califate. And, in the event, it was Charlemagne by virtue of his central position that held the balance of the world's power—protecting the Spanish Muslims from the Eastern Calif and smiling on the Eastern Calif in his

challenge to the Eastern Empire of Constantine VI and Irene.

From 774 to 814 Charlemagne bestrode the world's stage like a colossus, observing the play of the three Califates and a rival empire. But we are only concerned here with the scenes in which the Emperor of Byzantium and the Calif of Baghdad come and go with the wearisome reiteration of their alarums and excursions between the Bosphorus and the Mesopotamian frontier. We may begin therefore with the year 757, when Constantine V advanced on the Muslim territories to capture Malatia, only to lose it again in the same year to the army and aunts of Mansur, who celebrated his victory by agreeing to a seven years' truce with the traditional enemy. In fact the truce appears to have lasted, with perhaps minor infractions of its conditions from time to time, until the last year of Mansur's reign, when we find hostilities resumed in a raid on Laodicea, resulting in the capture of a large booty of women and children and the acceptance by the Emperor of an obligation to pay an annual tribute to the Calif's treasury.

Meanwhile, in 769, Mahdi, having already

been declared heir-apparent in supersession of his cousin 'Isa, returned from his Persian campaigns to find a palace ready for his occupation in the Rusafa suburb on the east bank of the Tigris opposite his father's 'Mansion of Paradise.' And we may assume that with him came the young Harun, with his brother and half-sister and their mothers, to look upon the splendours of Baghdad for the first time. Six years later the ailing Calif went on his last pilgrimage to Mecca, having duly communicated to his son his last will and testament of advice, warning him against encouraging the growth of the eastern suburb of his beloved capital, and bidding him ever to favour and rely on the foreigners from Khurasan to whom the dynasty already owed so much.

His parsimony and frugality had left a wealth of treasure for the new Calif to dissipate, but Mahdi seems to have retained a reasonable balance in his expenditure on useful works and transient vanities. If he thought nothing of providing himself and his princely retinue with snow from the Persian mountains to cool their sherbet or wine—for the juice of the grape was no more taboo in court circles—on the arduous

pilgrim road to Mecca, he did at least think much of the needs of the ordinary pilgrim, and equipped the desert highway with rest-houses and reservoirs, while the improvement of communications in a vast and unwieldy Empire was his constant concern. It was in his reign that the postal service was accelerated and improved out of all recognition, while it was seemingly his brain that conceived the idea of appointing his confidential spies to every postmastership in the realm with the special function of advising him of all that passed—the local gossip and intrigues—in the distant outposts of the Empire.

He took up with characteristic energy from the beginning the long dormant feud with Byzantium ; and flying raids into Asia Minor as far as Angora produced the inevitable counter-attacks on the Syrian frontier, where the Calif's army suffered a serious defeat in 778. Nothing daunted, he set to work vigorously organising a huge army of 100,000 men to avenge the disaster, and, having proceeded as far as Aleppo to launch it on its way, nominated his son Harun, now about eighteen years of age, to the chief command, with Yahya

the Barmaki as his chief counsellor and many experienced generals in his train.

Thus did Harun, who had doubtless received a normal education in the military and civil functions of a ruling caste, have his first opportunity of distinguishing himself. Following the coast in his victorious progress, he reached the Bosphorus itself, where the Empress Irene was forced to sue for peace and pay a heavy ransom. By good luck or good management everything had gone so well on this campaign that a proud and delighted father nominated Harun forthwith to the governorship of all the western provinces from Syria to Adharbaijan, and soon afterwards proclaimed him as second in succession to the Califate after his elder brother Musa, surnamed Hadi. With this new honour he conferred on the younger son the title of Rashid—the virtuous or orthodox—but already the danger-signal of palace intrigue had begun to be apparent.

On his accession to the throne Mahdi had manumitted the slave-mother of his two sons and made her a queen by formal marriage. That she had ever exercised a strong ascendancy over him can scarcely be doubted, and

it is unlikely that her influence would be diminished by her new dignity. At the same time it was unfortunate that Harun was his mother's favourite at the expense of his elder brother, who had been proclaimed heir-apparent soon after Mahdi's accession. Khaizaran now intrigued with the Calif, who appears to have shared her preference for Harun, to get the eldest son set aside in favour of his brother. A suggestion on these lines was actually made by Mahdi in a letter to Hadi, who was then engaged in a Persian campaign, and who vigorously repudiated it, while disregarding an order of recall to Baghdad that soon followed. The unfortunate Hadi was thus forced into an attitude of apparent rebellion ; and his enraged father, doubtless spurred to action by the wife he loved so fondly, set out from Baghdad at the head of an army to enforce filial respect for parental authority.

He never returned, and the rebel son reigned in his stead. A poisoned fruit, apparently intended by one of his concubines for another more beautiful or more favoured, was eaten by Mahdi himself, who, at the early age of

forty-three, was buried in Persian soil, while the army that had gone forth with him was led back by Harun to Baghdad, and the insignia of the Califate were immediately forwarded to the rightful heir. By no single act of all his brilliant career did Harun better vindicate his worthiness of the imperial sceptre than by thus renouncing it in the interests of civil peace. The army was his for the commanding, and he disbanded it. His elder brother was at his mercy, and he placed him on the throne. His mother sought to thrust greatness on him, but he preferred to abide by the verdict of Fate. Of few can it be said so truly that he was born great.

As it turned out, he did not have long to wait. The reign of Hadi was short and without glory, though one substantial achievement must be placed to his credit. For the ten years of his father's reign his mother had played an active part in the affairs of the State, and had to some extent dominated the situation, not altogether creditably. She was too much obsessed with the question of the succession in favour of her younger son ; and the result was the disfigurement of Mahdi's

record by a series of palace intrigues, which could not have resulted otherwise than in civil war but for the accident of another woman's unintended intervention. Great issues hang by slender threads, and the nameless concubine who had accompanied Mahdi to the wars was destined to make brilliant history. Harun was to die young of an incurable disease, and his father perished by an accident. If the latter had lived as long as Mansur, Harun would never have reigned as Calif of Islam; and the familiar tale of the 'Arabian Nights' would have lost its central figure.

Hadi's first concern was to put his mother in her proper place. The Ministers of State, who had freely frequented her salon to know the real wishes of her husband, were warned to take their orders in future from the Calif himself and to respect the traditional privacy of a lady's apartments. 'Am I,' said he to his great officers, 'and my mother the betters of the like of you and your mothers, or not?' 'Verily art thou our better and your mother!' came the inevitable reply of the courtiers. 'Then, tell me,' he went on, 'is there any

among you would have men gossip of their mother, saying: Such an one's mother did this or said that?' 'There is none such among us,' they replied. 'Then what is it,' he asked, 'that makes you frequent my mother and gossip about her?' So the Queen-Mother was left in womanly peace thenceforth, to think of the splendours of the past and the possibilities of the future. But she refrained from tasting of the dishes sent by a dutiful son for her refreshment—poisoned dainties, suggests the recorder [1] of the court gossip though probably without proof—and lived to encompass his downfall at the hands of the concubines to whose idle society she had been relegated by his orders.

[1] *Kitab al Fakhri.*

IV

THE GOLDEN PRIME

The dawn of the golden age was heralded by dull clouds on the horizon. The troubles of the palace were reflected in the sporadic revolts and disturbances of a troubled Empire. And the alarums and excursions of Kharijites and Zindiqs in Mesopotamia itself paved the way for an actual rebellion in the Hijaz, where the battle of Fakhkh on the outskirts of Mecca settled in the year 786 the fate of another 'Alid rising and resulted in the death of yet another pretender of the 'Alid clan, Husain the great-great-grandson of the Calif 'Ali, whose tomb and the resting-places of his fellow-'martyrs' were to form in due course the nucleus of the modern suburb of Al Shuhada. The same battle resulted also in more distant reverberations, for there fled therefrom one named Idris ibn 'Abdullah, who found in the end a refuge among the Berbers of Africa and founded at

Fez a dynasty, which has lasted to our own times and even thrown back an offshoot to take root again in Arabia.

Yet, not content with the difficulties confronting him in many parts of his realm, Hadi had tempted Fate with an ill-advised intrigue to upset the arrangements of his father in the matter of the succession. Harun in all conscience had done nothing to deserve the animosity of his brother and even now preferred to retire into private life rather than contest the nomination of his nephew Ja'far as heir-apparent. Yahya the Barmaki, alone of all the court officials, counselled his sovereign against a step so unwise, but was cast into prison for his pains. And there was after all none left but the disgruntled Queen-Mother to keep the flag flying of her favourite son.

Hadi was away at his country palace near Mosul, apparently convalescing from some illness, when he was smothered in his sleep by his concubines. The news was rapidly conveyed to Baghdad, where Khaizaran, whose complicity in the plot can scarcely be questioned, had everything ready for the proclamation of Harun. By a strange coincidence the

latter's eldest son, the future Calif Mamun, was born of a concubine, who had been an Afghan princess, on the same auspicious day which thus ushered in what is regarded by the historians of the East as the most brilliant half-century in all the history of Islam. To what extent the splendid phantasy of the 'Arabian Nights' has been responsible for the glamour that has ever surrounded the reign of Harun al Rashid it is difficult to say, but sober historians, especially in the East, have been inclined rather to lay a greater emphasis on the era of Mamun, who, it must be remembered amidst all that can be said in his favour, was after all the lucky heir of a fully developed civilisation. Yet, in exalting these two reigns of father and son, they would seem to err in neglecting the undeniable importance of the long period during which Mansur not only laid solid foundations for the Califate, but erected most of the superb structure which was at once the scene and source of all the later brilliance.

Without Mansur it may be doubted whether the 'Abbasid Califate would have survived the vicissitudes of the troublesome world of those

times. Without him there would have been none of those reserves of wealth, conserved by his parsimony, whose splendid dissipation by his grandson and great-grandson made Baghdad the hub of the civilised world for the nonce, only to plunge it thereafter—when its wealth was exhausted—into the abyss.

Historians have indeed scarcely been fair to Mansur, and the reason may be sought in the careful financial administration which in those days went by the name of parsimony and meanness. He was no patron of the poets and chroniclers that later revelled under the benign encouragement of Harun and his successors, to distort (to some extent at least) the true values of the events they sang or recorded. But perhaps the worst that can be said of them is that, while not altogether successful in the task of placing the three greatest Califs of the 'Abbasid line in their true relative perspective, they were guilty of a more serious defect of omission in neglecting the solid contribution of the Umaiyids to the world's development out of the chaos of the Middle Ages. It is natural enough in the circumstances that they should have magnified the works of their own patrons

at the expense of their predecessors. But the impartial historian of the great Arab movement, which began with the Prophet's mission and ended with the fall of the Umaiyids, cannot but criticise adversely the tendency that grew so rapidly to jettison the stern but strenuous virtues of the desert, by which the Islamic Empire had been built up on the solid foundation of a single creed, in favour of the easy graces of the older paganism—of Rome as well as of Persia—which brought the whole edifice of the Califate crashing down in ruin as soon as the foundations had been effectively undermined by the growing ascendancy of foreign influences.

Mansur, as we have seen, sought simultaneously to profit by and control the exotic elements to which his dynasty had owed so much, but he had advised his son to pin his faith to them without reserve if he would be saved. And Mahdi, ably seconded by his Persian wife, had bequeathed to his heirs a system shorn of all but the name of the Arabian Califate. Persian influence was supreme and dominant throughout the Empire to which Harun the Virtuous succeeded in 786 A.D. on

the death of his elder brother. And for the next half-century the star of the Califate would stand at its zenith, to sink thereafter to an inglorious setting in the West, where Charlemagne was unconsciously laying the foundations of the modern world on just such primitive elements of tribal barbarism as had swarmed out of Arabia in the seventh century to conquer the earth. The rigidity of the faith and system of Islam has often been ascribed as the root cause of the failure of the Califate to make good, but it is at least permissible to seek the causes of its political decay in the return of the laxity of an older civilisation to sap its foundations at the very height of its glory.

For the moment we have to consider not the ultimate decline and fall of the Califate, but the heyday of its imperial splendour; and it will not be out of place to recall and emphasise the fact already noticed that Harun had owed his throne not to any self-seeking effort on his own part, but to the natural play of circumstances. Twice he had renounced his claim to the highest office, and thus given evidence of a character of no common order. His nominal command of the expedition against Irene had

brought him laurels which we need not take too seriously in one so young ; but the enthusiasm of both his father and his mother in his favour at the expense of their elder son may argue the possession of qualities too rare to be wasted in private life. Yet we know in fact little enough about his early years except that he and his brother were sufficiently addicted to the charms of music to move their father to warn the minstrels of the court against frequenting their society. And now at the age of twenty-three Fate had placed him on the world's greatest throne of those times, while posterity has on the whole awarded him a more than favourable verdict on the uses he made of the great opportunities which lay before him.

It was perhaps fortunate for him that Khaizaran, having successfully achieved her great ambition, disappeared quietly from the scene. We hear no more of her doings, but it is on record that she died in the year 790 at Baghdad, where she was buried in the cemetery on the east bank of the river in the district now known as Mu'adhdham. Her retirement, however, in no way tended to diminish petticoat influence—if we may use

so European a phrase of a country in which women normally wear trousers and men skirts —at court. The Round City indeed became a vast harem of the Calif's womenfolk, of whom three played some part in the history of the realm, while the rest—concubines, dancers, singers and the like—under the supreme charge of a notorious creature, the eunuch Salam al Abrash, constituted a monster chorus of beauty and talent beside which the splendours of Hollywood pale into significance. The slave-market of Baghdad, constantly replenished by the human proceeds of frequent wars, was drained through a sieve of experts into the palace, while sufficient was left of wit and loveliness after the satisfaction of their requirements to adorn the mansions of the nobles and merchants who had the means to pay for such luxuries. Sexual extravagance was the order of the day among the wealthy, while the common herd, who paid heavy taxes to support the State and court, would seem to have been limited by economic pressure to a system of practical monogamy. Yet prostitution does not seem to have formed a conspicuous feature of Baghdad life, and the police were expected to maintain an outward

show of decorum by the suppression of public soliciting and brothels. Even night-clubs were strictly confined to specified localities ; and sounds of revelry elsewhere were liable to subject the revellers to the unwelcome attentions of the guardians of the peace.

Wine, forbidden to the faithful, was not eschewed by their Commander, and flowed freely in the best salons to enhance man's delight in woman and song. And the emphasis is always placed, strangely enough, on the song rather than the woman, for the golden age of the Califate was essentially an age of music. To know not the tunes of Siyat and his pupils, Ibrahim of Mosul and Ibn Jami' of the Quraish, was to argue oneself unknown ; while Ibrahim is said to have maintained a regular conservatoire of budding artistes in constant training for the delectation of the Calif and his court. He had indeed suffered severe chastisement at the hands of Mahdi for corrupting the innocent youth of his sons, while on the same charge Ibn Jami', narrowly escaping the same punishment, had been banished to Mecca, where he appears to have squandered his substance on dogs and gaming. But the

damage had been done before its perpetrators were punished ; and years afterwards, when Mahdi was no more, a pauper minstrel presenting himself at the ' Golden Gate,' was duly put through his paces before a curtain concealing his audience. His first song brought down on him an enquiry as to its provenance, which he boldly answered with the assertion that it was his own. ' You lie,' he was told, ' it is Ibn Jami's.' His second effort met with a similar reception, but it was the turn of the audience to be astonished on hearing that it was indeed Ibn Jami' himself that had sung. So the old corrupter of the young prince was rewarded by the Calif with wealth beyond his wildest dreams, in return for which he rewarded his august patron by singing a coon-song snatched from the lips of an aged negress on the pilgrim road. To judge—if one may presume to judge the musical taste of other times —by the specimens of songs that caused their hearers to swoon away in a delirium of delight, it was poor stuff that passed for music in those days ; but it was the incipient patronage of the arts, so sternly discouraged by the puritan standards of Islam, that

counted perhaps for more than the art itself that was patronised.

The reigns of Harun and his son Mamun stand out conspicuously against the dark background of the world's ignorance as beacons welcoming the rebirth of the arts and sciences after their long eclipse. The treasures of the past were eagerly sought out in their obscure hiding-places, and the stored-up knowledge of ancient Greece was replaced at the disposal of the world in Arabic translations of the works of her philosophers, astronomers, doctors, herbalists *et hoc genus omne*, while the more recondite tastes of the masses were catered for in treatises on astrology and hypnotism, sword-swallowing, glass-chewing and the like. The torch of knowledge was relit and the taste for learning revived in an atmosphere that challenged the long monopoly of professional theologians. It is perhaps not so much the achievement as the example of Harun and his son that entitles them to the commendation of posterity as pioneers on the long and thorny path that pointed the way to the modern world.

As patrons of literature and art they have naturally been rewarded by the historians and

poets and anecdotists with some exaggeration of their services to humanity at the expense of their Umaiyid predecessors, but, after all said and done, the fame of Mu'awiya and his dynasty rests rather on their military exploits and the success of their empire-building than on services rendered to the worthier cause of human progress. They have left, indeed, a permanent mark on the world as far afield as Spain on the one hand and India on the other, but it may be fairly questioned whether their achievement can be compared with that of Harun, who not only added nothing to the territorial extent of his inheritance, but actually witnessed some diminution—notably in Africa—of the imperial stature of the Califate. Nevertheless he more than made good the loss of some precarious provinces by handing down to a posterity extending far beyond the limits of his effective influence as a ruler the priceless heritage of learning. And it is perhaps more particularly to his credit that this feat was achieved in an atmosphere wholly unfavourable to such a development by one who, despite his enlightened attitude towards the activities of the human mind, abated no

jot or tittle of his attachment to a creed of which he was the natural champion as the successor of the Prophet.

In spite of his addiction to the questionable or forbidden pleasures of music and wine—his enjoyment of female charm being well within the four corners of the Prophet's dispensation—it cannot be doubted for a moment that he was of a deeply religious turn of mind, and that he took quite seriously the duties and functions devolving upon him as the head of a theocratic State. The laxity of life at Baghdad may indeed have encouraged a tendency to freethought and irreligion in the higher strata of society ; but the Calif himself—except in the matter of wine—indulged in no such straying from the paths of virtue, and not only maintained unswervingly a correct attitude towards the essential tenets of his faith but seems to have displayed at times a tendency to fanaticism which had hitherto not been a conspicuous feature of the 'Abbasid Califate, though neither Mansur nor Mahdi had allowed himself the license or the extravagance of Harun.

Mansur had indulged neither in music nor wine ; and Mahdi, personally eschewing wine

though permitting its use at court, had soothed himself with song while carefully guarding his offspring from its seductions. Yet neither of them had evinced any bigotry or hostility towards the devotees of other faiths than Islam, while Harun, conspicuous in his attachment to music and discreetly free in his partiality to liquor, showed himself in the end somewhat intolerant of the Jews and Christians, on whom he was the first of the Muslim rulers to impose the obligation of wearing distinctive dress. A capitulatory measure of this kind may indeed have been to some extent advantageous to its victims rather than otherwise, in protecting them from the attentions of the police during their indulgence in practices permitted by their religions but denied to the devotees of Islam. On the whole, however, the Jews and Christians of Baghdad felt the new regulations as a derogation of their status, while Harun's hostility to churches and synagogues was as injurious as it was offensive. Up to this time, and dating from long before the refoundation of Baghdad, the Jews and Christians had enjoyed complete liberty of worship in the land of the two rivers ; and the site of the new capital had actually

been chosen on their experienced recommendation that of all the surrounding country it enjoyed the greatest immunity from mosquitoes —the great pest of all irrigated countries in or near the tropics. Their hamlets and monasteries had been freely planted in all the best positions of the neighbourhood ; and Mansur, in expropriating them from the lands required for the Round City, had paid the owners a full price for such disturbance. That there was a large non-Muslim element living on terms of reasonable equality with the Muslim population in the early days of the 'Abbasid Califate admits of no doubt ; and we hear frequently, in the annals of the period, of the churches and synagogues available in the different parts of the city on both sides of the river for their devotions.

Harun, however, sent forth an edict for the demolition of the temples of the infidel, while it was further ordained that the residences of non-Muslims should on no account rise to a height commanding the privacy of the neighbouring faithful. Fortunately the tendency to restrictive legislation did not appear in full force until towards the end of his reign ; and

it would seem that the persecution of Jews and Christians was of short duration, for they had already recovered a good deal of their old freedom of action and devotion under a species of protective or capitulatory régime introduced by the Calif's immediate successors. For all the bigotry displayed in this matter, Harun himself did not disdain the services of a Christian as his private physician ; and, generally, the Christians and Jews appear at this time to have monopolised many branches of activity in which secular learning was an essential ingredient. In finance and medicine and other arts and sciences it was, indeed, they who commanded the best market, and it is difficult to find a satisfactory explanation of Harun's attack on their liberties in view of the circumstance that, but a little while before, he had received and lavishly entertained a diplomatic mission, sent by no less a monarch than Charlemagne himself with the express object of securing from the Calif some amelioration of the conditions under which at that time Christian tourists from Europe had to visit the Holy Land of Palestine. Not only did Harun prove—as we may suppose—accom-

modating towards the demands of his opposite number in Christendom, but he was sufficiently flattered by the attention of the Roman Emperor to load his envoys with costly and exotic gifts —including an elephant and a water-clock of curious design—for their master. And, not content with this contact with the West, he appears of his own volition to have despatched a diplomatic mission to the lord of China, whose mercantile marine and costly wares were familiar enough in the waters and markets of Baghdad.

It may therefore be suggested that the retrograde step of his later years was in part the aftermath of the downfall of the Barmak family, which for half a century had directed the policy of the Califate into the paths of wisdom and toleration; while a contributory cause may well have been the renewal of the desultory feud with Byzantium as the result of the denunciation by Nicephorus of the tribute previously agreed to by Irene as the price of peace between the two States. Between 803 and 807 this war had been prosecuted with varying results, while the last word at the moment had rested with the Byzantine Emperor

by virtue of decisive victories at Tarsus and Mar'ash, which Harun did not live to avenge except by somewhat senseless retaliation on the innocent heads of his own non-Muslim subjects.

This phase of religious intolerance cannot but be regarded as a blot on the reign of Harun, though it serves also to emphasise the fanatical tendencies underlying his character and to display him in the colours of a doughty champion of the Islamic faith, whose interests he served in other ways less open to criticism. Not only was he punctilious in the observance of the sacrament of prayer—one of the essential pillars of the faith—and of the obligation to bestow alms on the poor and needy, but he is represented by the historians as incurring a daily expenditure of 1000 silver *dirhams* (£40) on the relief of poverty and as prostrating himself at prayer no less than a hundred times a day. He must thus have spent about four hours a day in formal acts of devotion, and, his nights being for the most part devoted to more frivolous pastimes, it is small wonder that the cares of State came to be more and more relegated to the tender mercies of his devoted and capable ministers.

Yet the catalogue of his devotion to the interests of Islam is even now not exhausted, for posterity cannot but remember to his credit the record he has left behind of pilgrimages performed to the holy shrines of Mecca and Madina, and of public works undertaken by him for the facilitation of similar visitations by his subjects. He is said to have performed the pilgrimage no less than ten times during his reign of twenty-three years, each time with a vast retinue of his courtiers and people and on the most splendid scale, while in years when he was otherwise occupied himself he did not forget to organise for the benefit of others and in honour of the Prophet cavalcades across Arabia as splendid and as numerous as those which he conducted in person. In modern times, when changed circumstances and highly-developed shipping facilities have brought about a somewhat different concept of the connotations of the Meccan pilgrimage, it is difficult to think back to a period when intending pilgrims had to face a long and arduous journey across the Arabian desert to attend the culminating ceremony of their faith ; but to this day the very name of the main pilgrim road from Bagh-

dad to Mecca preserves the memory of Harun's untiring devotion. The Darb Zubaida, named after the great queen who ever seconded and encouraged him in the service of God, is an abiding memorial of his unfeigned piety, though the rest-houses, guard-posts, milestones and reservoirs with which he adorned the long and weary way have long been but memories or ruins. And 'Ain Zubaida, a famous aqueduct similarly named after the queen, still brings down from the flank of the great mountains of the Hijaz the water needed for the refreshment of the citizens and pilgrims of Mecca, though the passage of years and the accumulated silt of ages have so filled up the valley through which it runs that the actual site of the source tapped in the time of Harun is unknown, while the masonry channel he laid down to preserve the water from contamination on the way is more than one hundred feet below the modern surface.

In nothing did Harun—and in this he was but carrying on the policy of his immediate predecessors—shew more splendidly the true quality of his character than in these public works undertaken by him in the interests of

distant Mecca ; while, when we remember that each pilgrimage performed by him personally must have involved the devotion of at least three or four months to the double journey and to the sojourn at the holy cities, we can scarcely withhold our admiration in placing to the credit side of his account a total period of three years consecrated to a religious function out of a reign of three and twenty. The money expended on the various public works connected with this service must have run into many hundreds of thousands of pounds ; while it was apparently Harun who instituted the practice, which has held good ever since, of providing the Ka'ba with a new annual covering of rich and costly stuff. It can thus be claimed for him, perhaps with reason, that no Calif, before or after him can challenge comparison with him in his devoted service of the foundation from which he derived his title to rule the Muslim world.

His secular record is, however, more open to diverse interpretation, and in one important aspect the verdict must be unfavourable to him. His predecessors, as we have seen, had fully realised and intermittently feared, with-

out being able to check it, the growing influence of foreign elements on the policy of the State. Mansur in the end had actually counselled Mahdi to yield to and embrace a development so inevitable ; but Mahdi, like his father, had not altogether reconciled himself to the abandonment of manners and methods that still formed the traditional basis of his house. And to some extent, by providing the important and powerful Barmaki element with splendid but exacting commissions in the provinces, he had succeeded in maintaining a measure of independent control modified only by the influence of his Persian wife. But Harun had been born and bred in a different world—a world in which the ascendency of the house of Barmak was the acknowledged sheet-anchor of the Califate amid the storms that assailed the ship of State—and his accession was the signal for the frank acceptance of foreign standards in all spheres but that of religion. The adoption of the Persian new-year festival of Nau-Ruz was an outward and visible admission of the weaknesses of a lunar calendar. Persian fashions in hats and clothing invaded both court and society in supersession

of the primitive simplicity of Badawin modes. From every part of the world the foreigner was invited to enhance the glory of the Califate with his arts and graces. And, above all, the actual governance of the realm was committed to the able hands of Yahya the Barmaki, in the rôle of Wazir, and his son Fadhl, the Calif's foster-brother ; while another son, Ja'far, became the favourite companion of Harun and, in that capacity, practically the chief officer of the court. In all but the church foreign influences became definitely predominant. Harun himself would have reason to bemoan the new development, whose steady growth would sap and ultimately overthrow the whole structure of the Califate. And only the church, still securely based on the primitive principles of Arabia, would survive the ensuing chaos in which the Empire would founder.

As time went on, it became increasingly apparent that the splendour of the court and the government was but an exotic plant, nursed into luxuriant blooming in the midst of an arid desert by the tears and sweat of a people living in almost servile bondage. The distant provincial governors and the great

officers of State at the capital rolled in the wealth extracted mercilessly from the subject population of the Empire and shared in reasonable proportions with a vigilant Treasury. The Government governed recklessly if splendidly; and no better example of the conditions obtaining in the Empire at its zenith need be quoted than the Calif Mamun's nuptials with Buran, the daughter of an ex-Viceroy of 'Iraq. In one way or another over a million pounds were expended in princely celebrations of the ceremony, and the impoverished father of the bride was assigned the revenues of certain Persian districts for a year to help him recoup his fortunes. Such was the way of that world. Palaces rose to celebrate the good fortune of palace minions, and fell almost as rapidly to mark their fall from favour; but ever the cost of construction and demolition and reconstruction came out of the pockets of a people seared by poverty and seething with discontent.

It is true that Baghdad at this time was one of the principal centres of the world's commerce. Its merchants trafficked in the splendid wares of East and West, and there

must have been a fringe of common wealth round the central shrine of the Califate, which was doubtless the chief, if not the only, customer of the captains of commerce and industry. A slave or a fabric that caught the fancy of the Calif's brokers would fill the pockets of the fortunate middleman with fabulous gold ; but the same man might at a moment's notice be held to ransom at the whim of the ruler or his proxies. And, even in the reign of Mansur, the whole structure of corruption and irresponsibility had grown to such dimensions that Khalid, the chief of the Barmak family, could be called upon to pay a fine of 3,000,000 *dirhams* (say £120,000) within three days, and was able to do it within a negligible fraction of the total sum to save himself alive. Mansur is said to have left behind in his Treasury reserves sufficient to meet all the requirements of the government for ten years. Mahdi certainly did not neglect such a windfall, and Harun spent as lavishly as his father, though he managed, nevertheless, to bequeath to his successors a treasure reckoned at 900 millions [1] of *dirhams*, or £36,000,000 ! And that was but

[1] Muir, p. 485.

the reserve amassed through twenty-three years of splendid extravagance scarcely paralleled in the world's history. The source of revenues capable of producing such results must ever remain a mystery. Much of this wealth came of course from the straightforward plundering of conquered enemies, as was the fashion of the time, for the imperial Treasury took one-fifth of all captured booty. But the bulk of it must have been derived from normal taxation, assessed on individuals or communities at the caprice of publicans and local governors ; and we cannot but arrive at the conclusion that the subjects who fed the insatiable Treasury were the victims of organised oppression and tyranny on an unprecedented scale.

In surveying the circumstances of Harun's Califate we seem to be assisting at the spectacle of a heart beating fast and furiously in a paroxysm of fever which was reducing the body of an empire to the extremes of sickness and misery. The shadows of future decay were thrown forward on to the screen of history by the brilliant kaleidoscope of a puppet-show, which dazzled its beholders at the time and has blinded posterity—thanks to

the unholy alliance of the historian and the storyteller—to the emptiness of a limelit scene of splendour surrounded by the murky night of wailing and gnashing of teeth. While the Calif and his court, searching the world over for men of wits and parts, staged the renaissance of art and learning at the capital, the subject population was left in the outer darkness of ignorance with no attempt made to cater for its needs in the matter of education. Denominational schools were maintained by the clergy in the mosques for the instruction of the young in the elements and in religion. But secondary and more advanced education was left to chance or to the individual patronage of youths who might catch the eye or win the favour of the great. There was neither system nor organisation of the opportunities offered by the dawn of the new light ; and it was not till later that, under the patronage of definitely foreign elements such as the Buyid princes, Baghdad became a University centre to propagate learning for its own sake amidst the dying embers of the 'Abbasid Califate.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that, apart from the spacious brilliance of the court

itself, all that was best in Baghdad in the heyday of 'Abbasid rule was concentrated in the commercial community, which, with the best and most princely of customers at its door, appears to have settled down at a comparatively early date to develop on lines of its own devising. It was favoured certainly by the site selected for the capital of the Empire by Mansur—a centre from which all the main roads of the world seemed to radiate so naturally and inevitably. At the same time we have seen that Mansur, little suspecting the early commercial eclipse of his political dream, had catered so meagrely for the trading requirements of his capital that within a few years he was constrained to eject all the merchants from the inadequate accommodation provided by the monster circuit of his walls. We have seen how the commercial community, quick to grasp the opportunity provided by unlimited space, settled down rapidly and effectively to organise its activities for the common benefit of itself, the court and the world. Each point of vantage became the nucleus of a particular craft or calling; and from that arose the splendid edifice of trade-guilds which, in one

form or another, has continued to dominate the world ever since, until by regular stages it developed into the mammoth stores and immense trusts of modern capitalism. The concentration of homogeneous interests was the lesson taught by Baghdad to posterity, which has tended to reserve the old practice for the needs of industry while developing independently the system of vast heterogeneous stores for the retail supply of their requirements to whole districts.

The capital of the 'Abbasid Califate was indeed a clearing-house of the world's commerce. In its two harbours the junks and dhows of China and the Indian Ocean met the rafts and flat-bottomed arks of the Upper Tigris and Euphrates; while numerous camping-grounds on both sides of the river accommodated the ships of the desert, which converged on Baghdad from the wilderness of Arabia and Syria and from the uplands of Persia, bringing up the products of distant lands to barter for those of the furthest seas. And with the goods of the world came its learned men to bask in the sunshine of a brilliant court, whence the Calif and his ministers, dazzling

their visitors with the splendour of their imperial magnificence, directed the administration of a huge and unwieldy Empire—not without anxiety. Nature, skilfully courted by the foresight of Mansur, had endowed the capital with a central situation almost ideal from the strategic and commercial points of view, sufficiently distant from enemy centres to discourage hostile penetration without impeding the activities of legitimate commerce. Baghdad stood at a natural junction of immense waterways that tempted the argosies without encouraging the armadas of the world. And man had but to concentrate on the land-routes, which linked the distant fringes of empire with the capital, in the common interests of commercial, strategic and administrative efficiency.

To a considerable extent, doubtless, the organisation of these routes—caravan-tracks of incredible length extending to all parts of the Empire—had been developed by and inherited from the old Roman and Persian Empires which had been absorbed by militant Islam. Nevertheless the 'Abbasid Califate is entitled to full credit for the manner in which it

developed and perfected its lines of communication, while the pilgrim route across the Arabian desert must be regarded as an original contribution of Harun and his predecessors to the welfare of their subjects. The desert route between Baghdad and Damascus—and thence down through Palestine to Egypt and so to the African provinces—was of older standing and had already been developed by the Umaiyid Califs on the foundations inherited from Rome; but the selection of Raqqa on the Euphrates as an alternative—and later as a favourite—residence by Harun can scarcely have been unconnected with strategic reasons, such as the need for controlling the ever uneasy province of Syria and for maintaining through it an open road to the Byzantine frontier both for defensive and offensive purposes. The Persian high-road was similarly inherited from the past, but here again we meet at every turn the improving hand of the 'Abbasid Califs and their Persian advisers. Apart from further Africa, which was never effectively in the picture of Harun's Empire, there was no part of the realm so liable to dangerous eruptions of political discontent or

ambition as the distant fringes of Persia. Harun himself was destined to die at Tus in the course of an expedition which he led in person to crush a rebellion on his north-eastern frontier ; and his recognition of the essential seriousness of the Persian problem is apparent in his testamentary creation of Khurasan as a sort of *imperium in imperio* with the independent command of the army of occupation in favour of his second son Mamun. Such a treatment of the problem was, indeed, fraught with trouble for the sons he left to contest the throne, but for the moment we are only concerned with his constant anxiety to keep his most precarious provinces within the orbit of his own Empire and with the steps he took to give effect to that design.

The Persian highway became perhaps the most highly developed strategic route of the Eastern Califate, and in its development we see most clearly the working of the best brains of the time. At every stage fortified rest-houses or caravanserais were provided for the accommodation and safety of travellers ; and each such stage, being mainly designed for the facilitation of communications between the

capital and the frontiers, was placed in charge of a postmaster, whose function was partly to keep communications open at all times, and partly to play the spy on the machinations of the provincial governors and of any ambitious elements that might be tempted for one reason or another to challenge the authority or supremacy of the central Government. This vast network of espionage through the medium of the local post-offices was perhaps the most striking feature of the 'Abbasid imperial administration, and, whatever we may be disposed to think of a government on so vast a scale held together by the cement of a system so precarious, we can only recognise with respectful amazement both the apparent efficiency of the spy-machine and the extraordinary mobility of the great armies of the Califate, which at a moment's notice were able to reach and strike at the roots of sedition in the uttermost corners of the Empire.

At the same time we must note with pain the apparent assumption of universal corruption in high places and the direction of all the efforts of the central Government not so much to the securing of justice and good administra-

tion in the interests of its subjects as to the squeezing out of reluctant and rapacious proconsuls of a fair share of their ill-gotten gains for the central Treasury. The 'Abbasid Califate had not arrived within measurable distance of a true appreciation of the ethics of imperial administration. The twin evils of graft and insecurity were still the accepted order of the day, as they would continue to be for many centuries to come—as indeed they are to-day in more of our modern world than we care to believe. And so—to judge by modern standards honoured more often still in the breach than in the observance—the imperial record of the 'Abbasid prime is scarcely one that provokes admiration. The halo of Harun served but to throw a beam of lurid light upon the gloom of harassed subjects that fed his pomp. The foundations of his glory were laid upon the sands of tyranny and caprice ; and the avenging Fury would use him as the instrument of his dynasty's downfall. It was he himself that felled the pillars of his State.

V

THE TRAGEDY OF BARMAK

For years after the catastrophe that put an end to the rule of the Barmaki ministers, the 'Abbasid court shuddered at the memory of their merit, which faded but slowly into the oblivion of a generation that knew not Jacob. To their credit, be it said, the historiographers of the period refused to forget their services or to condemn their shortcomings, for which reason indeed we can perhaps never know the exact reason of their downfall or the full details of their persecution. The rules of taste and good form—to say nothing of a natural fear of consequences—inevitably discouraged the singing of their praises in the presence of the Califs, but there has ever been in the Arab character a curious streak of impetuous generosity. The victims of tyranny have been remembered despite the susceptibilities of the tyrants; and the tragedy of Karbala has

clouded the splendour of the Umaiyids just as the glory of the 'Abbasids at their zenith has been credited equally, and without too fine a discrimination, to the Califs of those days and to the three generations of the Barmak family which served and supported them. And even of Mamun, the son of Harun, a charming story is recorded to shew how he paid better than lip-service to the memory of a régime probably unsurpassed in the annals of Arabia.

The palaces of the Baramika had been demolished by order of Harun and their rich fiefs confiscated to the State; but Mamun had heard tell of a mysterious man of letters and learning, who was wont of nights to frequent the ruins of the Barmak mansions to chant the praises of their fallen masters. Puzzled and disturbed by such a proceeding, he determined to probe it to the bottom; and one night he sent a servant with two others to lie in wait for the nocturnal visitor and hale him to his presence. The emissaries duly found the object of their search but remained in hiding until he had completed the ceremonies of his nightly mission, whereupon

they appeared before him. 'Come to the Calif!' they said. He craved but the time to make his will, in the settled conviction that he would not survive the night. And in due course he appeared before Mamun. 'Who are you?' asked the Calif, 'and in what have the Baramika merited that which you do each night among their ruined mansions?' Having received permission to tell the tale, he proceeded as follows: Oh Commander of the Faithful! I am Mughira ibn Mundhir of that once royal line and, my prosperity waning as wanes the prosperity of men, I found myself in debt even to the point of having to sell all that I possessed, I and my family, with the very house in which I was born. Now people told me of the Baramika, and I fared forth in search of them from Damascus even to Baghdad with all the members of my family, some thirty of us and more with nothing among us to sell for our bread. So we came to Baghdad, and, leaving my family in a certain mosque on its outskirts, I entered the city and came to a splendid temple, which I entered with trepidation to seat myself among the congregation gathered therein. And lo! as I sat there,

a servant appeared summoning us ; and I rose with the rest, dripping with perspiration, for this rôle of beggar was new to me. So we entered the mansion of Yahya ibn Barmak to find Yahya himself seated on a bench in the garden with ten of his sons about him. We saluted him, and he counted our numbers—an hundred of us and one. Thereupon there came in an hundred and twelve servants, each carrying a plate with a thousand pieces of gold thereon, one of which they presented to each man present. Now I saw that they all stuffed the money into their fobs and secreted the plates themselves under their mantles, having done which they rose and went forth, each in turn, until I alone was left, not daring to touch the plate of gold before me. Thereupon a servant signed to me and I did as the others had done, rising to go but looking ever furtively behind me in fear that I should be stopped. And so I came to the courtyard where Yahya, noticing my confusion, sent for me to enquire its cause. When I had told him my story he sent for his son Musa, and committed me to his charge saying : My son ! this man is a stranger ; take him along with you and entreat

him well. So I abode with him in one of his mansions two days and two nights in the greatest comfort, after which he passed me on to his brother 'Abbas, saying : The Wazir told me to look after this man, and you know how busy I am at the Calif's court ; so take him with you and deal with him generously. He in turn passed me on to his brother Ahmad, and so I abode ten whole days with one or other of the family, but knowing not how my own folk fared or whether indeed they were dead or alive. On the eleventh day a servant came to me with others in attendance, saying : Now rise and go to your own people ! I was now perplexed and disturbed at the thought of going back to my family like that with nothing for them, for the plate with the gold pieces was no longer in my possession and I thought it had been stolen from me. But the servant reassured me, saying that he had orders to provide me with all I wanted. Whereupon he led me from room to room, raising the curtains which hid each from other as he went, until beyond the last curtain I came to a splendid chamber reeking with perfumes ; and there I found my children and relations in splendid

raiment awaiting me. I was presented, moreover, with 100,000 pieces of silver and 10,000 pieces of gold, in addition to the original plate of gold pieces which I now recovered, together with the title-deeds of two fiefs. And so for thirteen years I abode, oh Commander of the Faithful! with the Baramika in their mansions, so that people knew not whether I was one of them or a stranger among them. Until there befell them the trouble that befell them at the hands of Rashid, whereupon 'Amr ibn Mas'ada came down upon me and demanded in respect of my two fiefs taxes exceeding the whole income thereof. Thus it was that, when calamity had again overwhelmed me, I used to go to the ruins of the Barmak mansions to mourn their fate and celebrate their munificence.

On hearing this story Mamun sent for 'Amr ibn Mas'ada. 'Do you know this man?' he asked, on his appearance. 'Yes!' he replied, 'oh Commander of the Faithful! he was a client of the Baramika.' 'And what taxes did you impose on his fiefs?' 'So much on this and so much on that,' he replied. Whereupon Mamun ordered to make full and ample restitution to the unfortunate man, who could only

respond with an outburst of pitiful lamentation. 'Now why do you weep,' asked the Calif, 'seeing that we have loaded you with gifts?' 'Alas, alas for the Baramika!' he replied, 'for this also is of their munificence, for how could the Calif have come to know of my plight had I not frequented the ruins of their palaces to mourn their fall?' And the Calif, relates the narrator of the story, was moved to tears and grief, saying: 'By my life! this is verily of the doings of the Baramika, for whom I weep, to whom I render thanks and whose services I remember with gratitude.'

No episode of all the strange saga of the Barmak family serves better than this to illustrate the golden prime of the 'Abbasid Califate —an age of flowing wealth, mercilessly gathered up from the uttermost corners of the Empire, carefully husbanded by the genius of a dynasty of financial experts and lavishly poured out, alike by the rulers and their ministers, for the glorification of an imperial court. A combination of riches and irresponsibility was the keynote of the time, setting a dangerous precedent for other ages less prolific of virtue. For there was virtue, and to spare, in the world that was

struggling to birth out of the dark ages—and much of it was concentrated in the Empire of the Eastern Califate in spite of its failure to recognise as meritorious in itself the lightening of the fiscal burdens of a serf-like subject population. War and taxation to the limit of reasonable endurance were respectively the normal function of sane governments and the inevitable fate of those who were subdued by them.

In the early days of Islam the Arab, as the conquering, dominant element, was not taxed but well paid, while the scale of subject taxation laid down by the Prophet and his successors was reasonable enough. But the Arab governors and those that supplanted them in due course had to find money to pay their armies and remit to the central Treasury—to say nothing of their families; and laxity of assessment remedied the deficiencies of the unalterable basic rates until the system degenerated into a scientific scheme of wholesale oppression by a host of underlings concerned only to enrich themselves and their employers. The colossal wealth amassed by provincial governors and their retinues was a blot on

the imperial escutcheon of the 'Abbasids; yet we may suppose that the proconsuls to some extent imitated the manners, and with them the virtues, of the capital, dispensing in charity some part of the wealth acquired by robbery and violence. Charity indeed—the *Sadaqat* of the Prophet—was the virtue with which the rich and powerful salved their troubled consciences or sought the plaudits of the masses. And we have seen how Harun conducted a daily distribution to the poor as a sort of constitutional exercise for his soul. In the same capricious coin he paid for his amusements and for the celebration of his virtues and exploits for the delectation of posterity. But the scions of the house of Barmak, as keepers of the public purse, easily out-Heroded Herod, and, however one may disapprove of a system which places the poor, the needy, the sick and the deserving at the mercy of private wealth however acquired, we are only concerned here to establish the fact that much of the money squeezed by tyranny out of the subjects of the realm found its way back into the common gutter to feed the poor and encourage the learned.

That the Barmak family contested the palm of charitable extravagance with the sovereign Califs is a matter of history; and it is at least strange that history, which has laboured so fruitfully to hand down to posterity every detail of the family tree of the latter, should have left us almost in complete ignorance of the origins of the house of Barmak. Whether or not it was rooted, as is suggested in deference to the brilliant achievement of its representatives in the latter half of the eighth century, in the antique respectability of the Zoroastrian priesthood, it sprang Pallas-like upon the world's stage from the head of Fate —fully armed and accoutred to play its part. Khalid, the first of the line, was the first occupant of the new and comprehensive post of Wazir, invented or introduced from some obscure source by the bloody Saffah, first of the 'Abbasids. Yet it is by no means certain that he was the son of his father, a practising physician of Balkh named Barmak, whose wife was among the captives taken in the ten years' war in and around Khurasan which filled the reign of Walid in the early part of the eighth century. The lady was certainly restored to her

lawful spouse after a period spent in the harem of 'Abdullah, the brother of the Commander-in-Chief, the famous Qutaiba ibn Muslim. Khalid was thus born about the year 706 in circumstances that induced the Arab chief to accept the implication of paternity without disturbing the conventional responsibilities of Barmak, or the normal course of the boy's upbringing. And so it came about that the founder of a distinguished line of foreign ministers of the Califate was foreign only in all but birth.

In 749 we meet Khalid, now in his prime, in the company of Qahtaba of the Arab tribe of Taiy, one of the outstanding commanders of the movement that under Abu Muslim (of servile origin) placed the 'Abbasids on the throne. At this time Khalid held a high position on the staff and, accompanying his chief to Kufa, was soon marked out for preferment in the service of Saffah. He was apparently placed in charge of the finances of the Empire, while from that it was an easy step to the premiership. And one is left with the impression of a man of unusual ability, content to serve in whatever capacity might be

dictated by the requirements of the State rather than by his own ambition.

Greatness came to him almost unsought and in tragic circumstances, which but foreshadowed the fate dogging the footsteps of commoners grown too great for a subordinate rôle. Such an one was certainly Abu Muslim, maker of the 'Abbasid Califate and virtual ruler of the Empire under Saffah. He had made the mistake of challenging comparison with the heir-presumptive—particularly during the splendid pilgrimage conducted by them jointly in 754, the very year of Saffah's death. Mansur, now Calif, played with his father's lieutenant, used him to suppress the rising of a dangerous pretender and then had him butchered in his presence with characteristic callousness.

Khalid ibn Barmak was apparently retained in office in some financial capacity. At any rate in 763 we find him entrusted with the important task of directing the operations connected with the building of the Round City; and his relations with his master were then sufficiently cordial to enable him to give unpalatable advice without losing anything of his

influence in the process, though Mansur may have twitted him with his partiality for Persian *apparatus*. Under his watchful guidance—and we may perhaps attribute the notorious parsimony of Mansur in some measure to the sound policy of his finance minister—Baghdad came into being ; but Khalid himself would seem to have fallen from grace towards the end of Mansur's reign. In serving the State he had not omitted to help himself, and the Calif had come to know of some irregular transaction which had been particularly profitable to his minister. He was called upon to pay the huge fine mentioned in an earlier chapter and was only saved by the generous assistance of his friends and by the outbreak of a revolt at Mosul, whither he was sent as governor in 774. He was now nearly seventy years of age, with a distinguished record behind him, but he remained at his post at Mosul until his death in 780, the fifth year of Mahdi's reign.

Khalid had occupied the stage for more than a quarter of a century and had well and truly laid the foundations of his family's fortunes in the service of the Califate. His son, Yahya, was born in 738 and makes his first effective

appearance in history in connection with the fine imposed by Mansur as the price of his father's life. We may suppose, therefore, that at that time he was, in accordance with the traditional practice of the Orient, his father's right-hand man for the disposal of all business that could not be delegated to possible rivals. The secrets of the ponderous financial machinery of those times, when a mass of data had to be carried in the head which could not safely be entrusted to the official registers, tended to become family prerogatives; and the only guarantee against the possible disloyalty of ministers was the unwritten understanding that their wealth, amassed at the expense of the State, escheated to the crown in the event of their death or deposition. The system, bad as it may be, prevails in the Arabia of our times and in the numerous oriental States that surround it. The ruler purchases his peace of mind by sharing the contributions of his subjects to the maintenance of the State with the few persons indispensable to the processes of administration. The West has, on the whole, managed things better by relegating corruption to the ranks of the lowest and worst-paid classes

of officials, while assuring the honesty of those in high places with substantial salaries regularly paid and reasonably secured.

Yahya would seem, however, to have entered the civil service, probably in a secretarial capacity in his father's department, many years before this incident, and, if we are to accept the year 763 for the birth of Harun and his foster-brother Fadhl (the son of Yahya), he must have gone to Persia with Mahdi in 758, probably with an appointment on the financial or administrative side of his staff. In that case he may well have returned to Baghdad with the heir-apparent in 769, and it is more than probable that he now began to play an important part in the financial administration of the capital as his father's deputy, while retaining his special position in attendance on Mahdi. The temporary disgrace of his father had doubtless prompted Mansur to remove the Barmak officials for a time from the fruitful scene of their peculations, and, Khalid having gone to Mosul, his eldest son was selected for appointment to the important governorship of Adharbaijan. This post he appears to have held till 788, when the Calif shewed his confidence in

him by nominating him to be the tutor and guardian of his son Harun, now fifteen years of age and thus by Arab reckoning no longer a minor. In the following year he accompanied his young and promising ward on the triumphant expedition against the Empress Irene, on which the Calif, doubtless mindful of the financial temptations involved, was personally represented by his Wazir, Rabi' ibn Yunis. Harun's triumphant début having been recognised by his nomination to the viceroyalty of the western provinces in 780, Yahya was appointed to accompany him, and thus became the virtual ruler of the West. This post he held till the death of Mahdi, though both he and Harun seem to have been frequent visitors to Baghdad during these years, while Yahya would seem to have remained there when Harun accompanied his father on the fatal expedition to Persia, designed to secure Hadi's acquiescence in a revision of the arrangements for the succession to the Califate.

It was Yahya, doubtless, that influenced his ward to recognise the accession of Hadi on the sudden death of their father; and it was certainly he that secured the peace of the

capital by making on his own responsibility a liberal grant for the payment of the mutinous troops that clamoured at the door of the Wazir, Rabi' ibn Yunis, who was apparently in league with Khaizaran to promote the cause of Harun. On the other hand it was he, and he alone of Hadi's ministers, that resisted the new Calif's plan of setting aside the rights of Harun to the succession, though he counselled the latter to retire for a while to the desert on the pretext of a hunting expedition and himself accompanied him into retirement, leaving his son Fadhl to watch events and report developments. He was, however, consigned to prison for his pains and even threatened with death ; but he survived the wrath of Hadi, to be rewarded before long by the grateful Harun with the important office of Wazir, which his father had held for a brief space thirty years before in the reign of Saffah. With this appointment and the preferment of his two sons, Fadhl and Ja'far, the Calif's contemporaries, to high office at court, began the period celebrated in history as the Golden Prime of Harun al Rashid.

Yahya became the virtual ruler of the realm with the Calif's commission to direct its affairs

at his unlimited discretion. Fadhl, at first his father's deputy in the offices of Prime Minister and Lord Privy Seal and afterwards viceroy of Persia, distinguished himself by his campaign in the province of Dailam against a pretender named Yahya ibn 'Abdullah of the 'Alid clan, who was skilfully lured to Baghdad under the Calif's solemn guarantee of immunity and there cast into prison. For this exploit Fadhl, on his return to Baghdad in 796, was accorded the extraordinary honour of a public reception by the Calif himself. And Ja'far, most famous perhaps as the boon-companion of Harun, became in turn Lord Privy Seal in succession to Fadhl, viceroy of Egypt (792) in addition to his duties at court, and Commander-in-Chief in Syria (796) to suppress a second rebellion of the turbulent Arab elements of that province. On his return thence in 797 he too was accorded a royal public reception and nominated to the viceroyalty of Persia. Before he could proceed thither, however, he was appointed Chief of Police at the capital, and in the following year he was further honoured by selection as guardian and chief adviser to the young prince Mamun, on whose behalf

he ruled the greater part of Persia. With the succession duly secured (in 799) to three sons of Harun in turn, including Mamun, who was to have the reversion of the throne after Amin, the son of the princess Zubaida, the star of Barmak was indeed in the ascendant; and the retirement of Yahya, full of years and honour, from the service of the State towards the end of the eighth century in favour of Fadhl, already familiarly known to the public as the 'little Wazir,' did nothing to impair the authority of the family in council.

The serious work of imperial administration was openly monopolised by Fadhl and Ja'far, while the Calif was encouraged to parade before his admiring subjects in royal progresses to Mecca; in splendid campaigns against his enemies; in the encouragement of art, literature and learning; in the service of the Church and in other harmless pursuits. Harun was intelligent enough to appreciate the situation created by his own excessive confidence and magnanimity; and we have seen how at times he rebelled inwardly at the vanity of his own importance, for he had only to look out across the river to see the real source of his greatness.

Yet he was powerless to tamper with the machine lest he should break it; and it is related that on one occasion Ja'far, having decided to devote himself to a night of frivolity with a few chosen companions, left explicit instructions with his doorkeeper to admit no one to the entertainment except a certain belated guest named 'Abdul Malik ibn Salih.

Now it so happened that, besides the individual intended, there was another of the same name, a very different person and a somewhat fanatical relative of the Calif, who had reasons for approaching Ja'far on urgent business that selfsame evening. Admitted by the excusable error of the doorkeeper to the convivial proceedings, he threw himself heart and soul into the fun to put his bewildered and shamefaced host at his ease. Having drunk wine and played the fool like the rest of the guests, he approached Ja'far towards the end of the evening on the errand which had brought him. He was in urgent need of a large sum of money to meet the pressure of his creditors, and Ja'far was able to set his mind at rest on that point by assuring him that the gold would be delivered at his house before his return.

He craved also some suitable official post for a son of his, whom Ja'far appointed on the spot to the governorship of Egypt. And, finally, he wanted one of the Calif's daughters to wife for the same son, and Ja'far was able to oblige him with the assurance that the betrothal would take place at once. Next morning the minister had to report what he had done to the Calif, and Harun signed away Egypt and his daughter with no more than a murmured suggestion that he might have been consulted in matters so intimately connected with the prerogative of a father and a sovereign.

The house of Barmak tempted Providence with a disingenuous frankness ; and Fadhl, we may be sure, had much ado to repair the extravagances of a younger brother, whose charm, exercised in an atmosphere of wine, women and song on the weaker facets of the Calif's character, was nevertheless a valuable asset in the furtherance of the family's policy of keeping Harun within the four corners of constitutional monarchy, while its members conducted the administration in the true interests of all concerned including themselves.

Only the pace was too furious to last. Ja'far

gambled to the last penny of his moral assets, diverting Harun—already probably a sick man intermittently, as will be explained in the next chapter, and nearing the age when long and uncontrolled indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh is liable to produce the nausea of satiety—against the fits of moroseness that arose from the contemplation of his vanity. So the end came with devastating suddenness and appropriately enough from behind the veil. The real cause of the Barmak tragedy can never be known with certainty, but there is more than plausibility in the theory that links it with a sister of the Calif, a favourite sister who had grown up with him and his favourite ministers but could now only share the amusements of the men by a subterfuge. To enable Ja'far and 'Abbasa to assist simultaneously at his nocturnal orgies, Harun had arranged that they should be married on the strict understanding that the marriage should never be consummated. So the woman was nightly exposed to the familiar sight and sound of sexual revels and expected to preserve her virtue. The test was too severe for human nature.

Every Thursday evening it was apparently the custom of Ja'far's mother, Zubaida bint Munir, to send him a hamper of choice wines and viands by the hand of some delicious concubine; and it so happened that on one such occasion—or perhaps more often—the mother was induced to substitute 'Abbasa herself for a more casual charmer. 'Abbasa conceived and bore a son to her husband, but the pair contrived to smuggle the infant away to Mecca lest the matter should become known against them. All would indeed have been well but for an accident. One of the slave-girls of the princess, having been beaten by her mistress for some offence, avenged herself by apprising Harun of her treason. The Calif acted without precipitation and determined to investigate the truth of the matter for himself on the occasion of his next pilgrimage to Mecca, which took place in the year 803 and on which he was accompanied by the unsuspecting companion of all these years of revelry. Now it was the custom of Ja'far, on the occasion of such pilgrimages, to prepare a banquet for Harun at 'Usfan, the first stage out from Mecca on the return journey to 'Iraq. And year by year

the banquet had been graced by the presence of the Calif, but on this occasion Harun excused himself on some specious pretext from acceptance of the customary invitation. And the great cavalcade dragged its weary way homewards under the cloud of a start so inauspicious, until at length it came to a halt at Anbar, a former capital of the 'Abbasids, on the frontier of 'Iraq.

From there, avoiding Baghdad, Harun betook himself to his now favoured residence at Raqqa ; and there, or in its neighbourhood, Ja'far was done to death by the Calif's executioner, Masrur. His body, carved into three pieces, was sent to Baghdad to be impaled on stakes set up on each other of the three bridges of boats, that the people of the capital might be apprised of the fall of one who, for all his faults, was a popular favourite. Fadhl and his father were disturbed at dead of night by the Calif's palace eunuch, who had them conveyed forthwith to Qaïm on the Euphrates, where they languished in prison to die of broken hearts and broken health before the reign was out or soon after. And all the wealth, property and palaces of the house of Barmak

were confiscated to the Treasury, while history draws a veil over the fate of other members of the family, which at one time provided no fewer than five-and-twenty incumbents of desirable official posts, both civil and military, in the State service, and which now, at a stroke of the pen as it were, disappeared for ever from the scene which for so long its members had adorned with such distinction.

With Ja'far and his family the glory of the Califate departed; and the historians are as unanimous in deploring their sudden fall as in condemning Harun for a senseless act of ill-tempered tyranny, which blotted the fair pages of a brilliant reign. That the actual cause of the tragedy was as simple as that here suggested cannot seriously be believed; but it is certainly to the credit of Harun that, in the savage manner of the age, he gave the fullest publicity to his action without, however, conveying to his people the slightest indication of the reasons underlying it. The exposure of the mutilated body of Ja'far, the imprisonment of his father and brother, and the demolition of the hospitable palaces of the whole family were

a challenge to public opinion. And the voice of the people was not raised in protest until the passing years brought into clearer perspective the relative merits of the Calif himself and the servants he had thus cut off in their prime.

In part, doubtless, there was fear in the people's silence, for, in spite of the manifest and distinguished services of the Baramika, Harun had never been a nonentity, as many of his line would become all too soon in the shadow of their powerful servants. But in greater part, perhaps, there was recognition of the simple fact that the fallen ministers had aimed too high with an implicit challenge to the Lord's anointed. The prestige of the Prophet's mantle was still no empty thing in those days and, in Harun's case, the wearer was worthy enough—notably so, in an age of growing laxity and freethought, in the spiritual domain of his great office. To challenge or trench upon the temporal prerogatives of the Prophet's successor was an offence in itself. And there must have been many who noted with disapproval the slow but steady divergence of State from Church in the supreme

direction of affairs. As Professor Nicholson [1] aptly points out: 'If Abu Nawas presents an appalling picture of a corrupt and frivolous society devoted to pleasure, we learn from Abul 'Atahiya something of the religious feelings and beliefs which pervaded the lower and middle classes, and which led them to take a more earnest and elevated view of life.'

Whether, as seems probable, 'Abbasa and her son perished in the holocaust of the Barmaks or not, it is scarcely likely that their part in the tragedy became a matter of public knowledge and judgment until many years afterwards, when the annalists got busy on the meagre material at their disposal; but other facts of importance were doubtless common topics of gossip at the time, and, while no single one of them would be sufficient to explain or justify the catastrophe, their cumulative effect on contemporary public opinion must have been considerable and goes some way to explain how the citizens of Baghdad endured for three years the sight of the bleached corpse of one who had been dealt with as a traitor

[1] *Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 303.

and was probably tacitly regarded as guilty, though with extenuating circumstances.

There was indeed one count in particular against Ja'far which must be regarded as a substantial contributory cause of his fall. We have seen how his brother, Fadhl, had been nominated to the command of an expedition against the pretender Yahya ibn 'Abdullah ibn Hasan, who had headed a serious rising in the province of Dailam and who was induced to surrender on a solemn assurance of pardon. Harun had broken faith with his luckless enemy to avenge the moments of terror he had suffered from his rising, and had committed him to the care of Ja'far to be kept in durance at his master's pleasure. But Ja'far had released him and spirited him away, while some enemy had been careful to bring the matter to the Calif's attention, and the fat was soon in the fire. We must therefore go back to the days of Mansur and Mahdi to trace briefly an undercurrent of intrigue which, never properly dammed at the source, led with other currents to the final act of the Barmak tragedy.

Ever since the year 759, when a procession

of the heretical Rawandis appeared before Mansur's palace at Hashimiya (near Kufa) to acclaim and worship the Calif as the shadow of God and remained as enemies to besiege him on the rejection of their impious overtures, heresy-hunting had been as common a pastime of the 'Abbasid rulers as place-seeking and intrigue had been of their ministers, ever manœuvring for position to control the sources of power and wealth. These two currents frequently crossed and recrossed, and the stability of ministers was often at the mercy of any breath of scandal that suggested a hidden affinity between them and some faction —notably, of course, that of the house of 'Ali —whose ambitions were incompatible with the survival of the existing régime. Matters had come to a head in the reign of Mahdi, who had sacrificed his chief minister, Abu 'Ubaid-allah, to the suspicion, dexterously suggested by a rival, that his son dealt in the black magic and subversive doctrines of the Zindiqs or Manichæans, among whose tenets was the virtue of incest in its grossest forms. The youth knew his scripture too ill to refute the vile charge and forfeited his life, while his

father was deposed in favour of the accusing rival.

Thus did Rabi' ibn Yunis become chief minister, to retain the post throughout the reign of Mahdi and, more precariously, during that of Hadi. On the accession of Harun, however, Yahya and his sons controlled all the chief posts, thanks to the influence of Khaizaran, who, according to a saying attributed to Harun himself, had stood out against the employment in any important capacity of the ex-Minister's son, Fadhl ibn Rabi'. The latter was a man of parts and was readmitted to high office on the death of Khaizaran in 790, the Privy Seal being withdrawn in his favour from Ja'far, who some time before had displaced his brother Fadhl as deputy of his father, still the nominal incumbent of the office as well as of the premiership. Fadhl ibn Rabi', however, aimed still higher and watched his opportunity in the rapid and reckless rise of the Barmak fortunes. Only two years after the death of Khaizaran occurred the rebellion of Yahya ibn 'Abdullah, and it was perhaps a year or two later that Ja'far, partly trading on his personal influence at court and partly unwilling to shoulder the

moral responsibility of prolonging the incarceration of one who had surrendered on a solemn bond procured by his brother, released the unfortunate but still potentially dangerous pretender. He may to some extent have been actuated by a superstitious dread of the consequences of raising his hand against a member of the Prophet's own house ; but it is scarcely conceivable that he ever entertained the idea of restoring the Califate to the house of 'Ali at the expense of Harun to whom he owed everything. Nevertheless this was the interpretation which preyed on the mind of the Calif under the skilful insinuations of Fadhl ibn Rabi', who made sure of every detail of the story through a servile member of the rival's household, whom he employed to spy upon his master.

Harun proceeded cunningly to establish the truth of his accusation, and Ja'far was invited, as he had often been invited before, to dine and make merry with his royal master. Casually during the festive proceedings Harun asked for news of the imprisoned pretender, and Ja'far, inclined at first to reassure him with an untruth but warned by a sudden intuition that

the question had not been so casual as it was intended to seem, blurted out the truth, while assuring the Calif that the man he had released was too broken in spirit and health to be dangerous evermore. Harun concealed his annoyance but thereafter schemed pettily to bring home to the offending but still important family a sense of their declining fortunes. Yahya, once the Calif's guardian and now a wise old man, had often pleaded with Harun to release his younger son from the ever-present dangers of his boon-companionship and familiarity; but Ja'far's company was still essential to the lighter moments of Harun's existence, and he himself enjoyed the good things of life too much to heed his father's warnings. So he continued playing the dangerous game of encroaching on the prerogatives of a sovereign who was at times a mere fellow in frivolity, while his brother Fadhl, developing on the more austere lines of his father, attended to the affairs of State and eschewed the relaxations of court life.

The effective influence of Fadhl ibn Rabi' increased steadily, and Yahya, who had at all times enjoyed complete freedom of access to the Calif for the transaction of State business,

and who was treated by the slaves and officials of the household with the courtesy and deference due to one so favoured, discovered a progressive freezing of the atmosphere around himself and his sons. In vain he pleaded with the Calif, urging his former right of entry even to the royal bedchamber at all hours of the day and night ; and loyally he accepted the implications of a changed situation, while one son persevered at the tasks of the comprehensive portfolio which he still held at the Calif's pleasure and another continued to play out his trumps recklessly against a watchful and not unskilful opponent. And so the game dragged on till 803, when the 'Abbasa incident touched Harun on the raw ; and the Calif, with the son of Rabi' to guide his hand and to give him courage, celebrated his return from the Great Pilgrimage with a holocaust of the family that had guided and controlled the destinies of the 'Abbasid Empire for fifty years.

The dismembered body of Ja'far graced for three years the three bridges of Baghdad, to be consigned in the end to a bonfire. Yahya and his sons languished in jail at Qaïm until death

or the clemency of Mamun released them from their durance; and we hear in later years of the appointment of Musa, one of Yahya's sons, to the viceroyalty of Sind. He had been governor of Syria for some time in 792, when Harun had sent him thither to deal with a revolutionary movement arising out of the traditional jealousy and rivalry of the Arab tribes long domiciled in that province since the original Arab conquest of 634; and he had proved himself an officer of great resource and exceptional courage. Later on, in 802, he had been imprisoned at Kufa by Harun for some offence, but had been released on the intercession of Yahya.

All the Barmak properties escheated to the State and only the person and family of Muhammad, a son of the original Khalid, were spared by the clemency of a furious monarch in recognition of their loyal but unspecified services. As we have seen, Harun had acted without haste and, as it seems to us at this distance of time, with calculated cunning and cruelty, playing his intended prey as a cat mauls the mouse it means to eat. And one is left to wonder vaguely

whether there be some grain of truth in the whispered gossip that the Queen Zubaida herself was not altogether innocent of complicity in a transaction which, for all the extenuating circumstances that may be urged in its palliation, history cannot but regard and has always regarded as a crime both senseless in itself and fatal to the glory of the Califate.

It is certain, at least, that during the pilgrimage ceremonies of 799 Harun had drawn up, signed, sealed and delivered to the inviolable sanctuary of the Ka'ba at Mecca a solemn deed securing the succession to the throne, in the event of his demise, to his sons Amin and Mamun in turn and in that order. Of the two, Mamun, the son of a concubine, was the elder in years and the special ward of the luckless Ja'far who may indeed, as is suggested, have sought at a later date to secure his precedence. But Amin was of royal blood throughout, the son of the Queen Zubaida, granddaughter of Mansur; and Zubaida may well have had fears for the future as she contemplated the powerful advocacy of Ja'far, which her own son's rival would enjoy on the death of her husband. Nothing can be proved against her,

but we can readily understand the tenderness of Mamun for the memory of the Baramika, though it must be said to his credit that the stepmother, who survived him after tasting of the bitterness of his triumph over her own son, had nought to reproach him with throughout the long reign that witnessed the full and final flowering of the 'Abbasid tree before the axe was laid to its roots. And to this day, among the tumbled ruins of her grandfather's Round City, they shew a tomb purporting to be the last resting-place of Zubaida, though the ascription is doubtful and it matters little whether she lies there indeed or in the more splendid building of the Kadhimain mosque opposite the cemetery that contains the forgotten tomb of her husband's mother. Her name at least 'liveth for evermore,' bestriding the Arabian desert with the route she travelled so often to the 'Mother of Cities,' whose people and pilgrims have good reason to bless her memory for the priceless boon of running water.

VI

AFTERMATH AND RETROSPECT

Harun lived but a lustre after the tragic fall of the Barmak ministry, carrying to the grave a secret flaw which gnawed at his vitals even as the memory of his crime plagued his soul, we may assume, to the end of a reign that had lost its savour. The cancer had its agonies, but he bore the pain with stoical patience to hide it from a world that would celebrate his passing with civil strife and might well anticipate such naughtiness if it but knew that the great Harun had been warned without hope of reprieve by the angel of death. He trembled at the hideous thought that his own sons might begin over his death-bed their struggle for the crown which he had bequeathed to each in turn and to yet a third after them. And so, seeking at last to die in the bliss of domestic peace, it was not till very near the end that he confided the secret of his disease to the

physician who had accompanied him on the last of his many campaigns.

For three years the country beyond the Oxus had been in a ferment with the rebellion of one Rafi' ibn Laith of Samarqand ; and Harthama, recalled from the West to replace a dishonest and ineffective general, 'Ali ibn 'Isa, had had much ado to maintain his position. The trouble had even shewn a tendency to spread into the eastern districts of Persia proper. So Harun, leaving Amin in charge of Baghdad and another son, Qasim, at Raqqa to control the western provinces, went up in personal command of reinforcements for Harthama's hard-pressed army towards the end of 808. He reached Tus near Mashhad in Khurasan in time to dig his grave, but had to relinquish the command of the troops to his son Mamun. And there in March 809, at the early age of forty-six, he died, as he had lived, in the full harness of a Calif militant and at the height of his glory, for all the clouds that had gathered about him during the last years of his reign. To his successors he left a vast treasure, a great name and a brilliant tradition which would be a living force for yet a generation.

And to the world at large he bequeathed a numerous progeny of eleven sons and fourteen daughters, whose seed has been scattered to the winds so that no recognisable trace of them has survived to our times.

The reign of Harun stands before us, as it were a picture without a background—admirable enough in itself but without meaning except in one respect. The literary, artistic and scientific achievement of 'Abbasid court cannot be ignored if we would see the development of the human mind and soul in its true perspective against the background of Man's struggle with the forces of Nature through the ages. The great achievements in medicine and philosophy of such men as Averroes and Avicenna, who formed a living link between ancient Greece and the Universities of Europe, were still, it is true, in the womb of time; but it was without doubt the 'Abbasid court that prepared the soil for their ultimate sowing. And, without going too deeply into the details of the scientific contribution of Harun and his contemporaries to the world's renaissance, it will not be out of place to recall the fact that a world, which had hitherto had to be content

with parchment and papyrus, received its first supplies of paper—apparently a Chinese invention—from the mills of Baghdad.

We have now seen how Harun began and ended his career with military progresses on the grandiose scale fashionable in those times. The first had brought laurels to the brow of a young man full of promise and manly vigour, while the last was but the angry tail-lashing of a wounded lion brought to bay amid encircling hunters. Yet his last act was typical—and shocking in one to whom the quality of greatness cannot be denied—for, when he had made his peace with God—'the most merciful of the merciful'—and prepared his tomb to receive him, they brought him in chains the captured brother of the rebel chief. That was indeed an occasion for mercy, but the 'enemy of God' was hewn to pieces before the dying Calif.

In his life, indeed, he had not been noticeably bloodthirsty, though he held the blood cheap of those that offended him—towards whom he was both cruel and malicious. In the circumstances he may even have enjoyed planning the details of the Barmak tragedy; but his treatment of Ibrahim al Mausali, a boon-

companion of himself and the unfortunate Ja'far, reveals more clearly than any other act of Harun the underlying strain of animal cruelty in his character, unless we may suppose his object to have been the closing of every possible source of scandal regarding the secret orgies of the court. Ibrahim was at any rate invited to dinner with his sovereign, who affected to repent the hasty act which had deprived them for ever of Ja'far's jovial company; and the unsuspecting guest, becoming sentimental in his cups, put his neck into the noose prepared for him. His execution stopped for ever the dangerous mouth of a loyal friend, but added a new count to the tale of crime that stands to the credit of the 'virtuous' Calif.

Harun was a despot by birth, by education and by force of circumstances, the heir of a hybrid political philosophy born of the strange union of a young and vigorous democratic Arabia with a prostrate, effeminate and ancient tradition of absolute monarchy. In Persia every Arab was a conqueror and ruler, while the folk, who had bowed humbly before their anointed kings, yielded the same homage as of right to the mere officials of the new dispensa-

tion. The new autocracy became more autocratic than the old and more ostentatious. Saffah had gloried in the spilling of blood as a means of cowing his subjects into submission. Neither Mansur nor Mahdi had sought to cloak or excuse the acts of despotic savagery that stand to their account. How then could Harun, invested as a mere boy with the command of a large army in the field with no objective but to rob and plunder as it went, be expected to develop a philosophy of rulership at variance with the models before him? How could one, entrusted but a year or two later with the viceroyalty of all the West, with absolute powers of life and death, appointment and dismissal, be expected to develop the humility and sense of service appropriate to a constitutional monarch?

In spite of the brief flicker of a democratic tendency in the Arabia of the Prophet's generation, the spirit of the age demanded of its rulers only the will and capacity to rule. And in that tradition Harun himself had been born and bred with inevitable consequences. He grew up not only willing to rule, but suspicious of any encroachment on his sovereign pre-

rogative and fearful of any rival that might challenge his authority. Yet it was of his own volition that he resigned into the capable hands of Yahya and his sons a seemingly unconditional power-of-attorney, which left but little scope for his own activities but secured him all the leisure he needed for the pursuit of his pleasure and for the development of a sense of grievance against his own growing futility. It only needed the awakening of the demon of jealousy—no difficult matter in the circumstances—to set in motion his envy, hatred and malice against servants, whose great services are undeniable and whose chief fault was the unnecessarily ostentatious parade of their good fortune.

To pass the sponge over the faults of Harun would be to belittle his virtues. Even Amin, his son—a worthless sort of prodigal, to judge by the records of him that have come down to us—could drink a glass of water in the presence of an uncaged lion and receive his charge on the point of a dagger as coolly as if he had been baiting a cat. And Harun was of truer mettle than Zubaida's offspring. His loyalty in difficult circumstances to his brother

Hadi, in spite of the promptings of his mother and the earlier encouragement of his father, was as admirable as his subsequent endeavour to deal fairly between his own sons in the matter of the succession—again in disregard of harem machinations. In both cases he shewed himself possessed of statesmanlike instincts. His capacity for physical activity was astonishing enough in one so partial to the delights of sensuous enjoyment. His sexual excesses were as much a part of his routine of life as his frequent pilgrimages to Mecca, but both left him plenty of time to spare for the more exacting claims of military service. He was essentially a man of action, though he was equally at home in the more sedentary rôle of literary and artistic patronage.

Apart from his self-effacement in favour of and during the short reign of Hadi, Harun must be given credit for having begun his own reign with a show of moderation and clemency, which merited a better sequel than the chronic eruptions of sedition that disturbed his Empire. His first act, doubtless inspired by the wise counsel of Yahya ibn Barmak, had been to release the members of the 'Alid family from

the restrictions on their liberty of movement imposed by his predecessor in consequence of the rising that had ended ingloriously at Fakhkh. They were thus allowed to return from virtual exile at Baghdad to Madina, but it was not long before they resumed their old scheming for the throne.

In 792 Yahya ibn 'Abdullah ibn Hasan raised the standard of revolt in the Persian province of Dailam with the consequences already sufficiently narrated. Harun was, however, less fortunate in his dealings with a brother of this pretender, Idris ibn 'Abdullah by name, to whom brief reference has already been made. Escaping from the battlefield of Fakhkh, he had made his way to Egypt and thence to further Africa, where, encouraged by the example of the Umaiyid dynasty in Spain and by the adherence of the Berbers round Fez, he had proclaimed a rival Califate. Harun's first instinct had been to send a great army to dissipate the new menace, but the expense and risk of such an expedition had caused him to adopt more subtle methods. One Sulaiman ibn Jarir was sent instead to encompass by such means as he could the downfall of the rival

Calif, and Idris in due course died of poison in 793, leaving a pregnant wife but no actual heir. The Berbers, awaiting the event, acclaimed the posthumous son, also named Idris after his father, as their Calif, and from that moment the province of further Africa ceased to owe allegiance to the Eastern Califate, while the Idrisi dynasty was destined to outlive the 'Abbasids and to survive into our own times both on the scene of its original choice and in a branch which managed to establish itself in the Arabian province of 'Asir about the middle of the nineteenth century. This little principality has only recently indeed lost its independent status by incorporation into the Wahhabi Kingdom of Arabia, while the surviving members of the family have, in spite of occasional ebullitions of their traditional restlessness, lost their former political significance.

There can be little doubt that the Dailam rising of Yahya was to some extent inspired by fear of reprisals on himself and his family on account of the then prospering bid of his brother for an independent throne in Africa. His nephew, 'Abbas ibn Hasan ibn 'Abdullah, had indeed been retained at Baghdad as a

hostage when the rest of the family had been allowed to return to Madina, while the first reaction of Harun to the movement of Idris had been to summon Musa ibn Ja'far al Kadhim, the sixth 'rightful' Imam of the Shia' faction, to the capital, where he remained till he died probably of poison—to become in due course one of the eponymous saints of Kadhimain. The loss of his African province and the ability of sporadic 'Alid pretenders to raise a following against the constituted authority of the State contributed to a gradual hardening of Harun's initial attitude of general tolerance ; accusation, true or false, of 'Alid sympathies found in the Calif a ready though cautious listener ; and none thereafter was safe from the guiles of the informer. But all these factors would seem to emphasise less the actual existence of any serious danger to the throne than a widespread feeling of discontent and irritation that ever provides the best platform for the critics of an offending régime.

Such were ever present in the Khawarij elements, which had first come into prominence in the time of the Calif 'Ali himself

and which had provided plenty of excitement and diversion throughout the period of the Umaiyid dynasty. To some extent their doughty exuberance, both physical and spiritual, had found an outlet in the military service of the Califs; but, ever and anon, some outstanding character among them would burst the bonds of reason and go out in open rebellion. Such a case occurred in the years 794 and 795—close on the heels of the 'Alid troubles—when one Walid al Shaibani, a chieftain of Upper Mesopotamia, attacked the township of Nisibin, and passed thence into the Armenian mountains to foment rebellion and gather forces. Rashid set a thief to catch a thief, selecting a fellow-chieftain of Walid, his own nephew Yazid of the proud tribe of Rabi'a, to pit against the rebel. The affair, however, dragged on until Harun, warned by his Barmak advisers that Yazid's dilatory tactics suggested a desire to spare an adversary of his own kith and kin, sent a curt note to his lieutenant, suggesting that he might have to send a slave to bring his own head to the royal presence if he could not arrange to send that of his adversary without further

delay. The rival armies now faced each other near Haditha, on the Euphrates, where the rival commanders agreed to decide the issue by single combat. And the rebel's head was in due course sent to the Calif with a full account of a thrilling duel on horseback, which had ended in the victory of the loyal commander.

Harun's selection of Raqqa as his normal residence in the later years of his reign was to some extent dictated by a desire to maintain some sort of personal control over the western part of his dominions. Spain and further Africa were now irrevocably lost to him ; but nearer Africa, Egypt and even Syria were hot-beds of perennial danger largely owing to the concentration in those areas of numerous true Arab elements, which watched with anxiety and jealousy the rapid rise of Persian influence at the court and capital of the Califs. He may even have had in mind the idea of an African expedition, while the possibility of complications with Byzantium was never very remote in spite of the truce with Irene.

As early as 789 or 790 a viceroyalty of the West had been constituted under 'Abdul Malik

ibn Salih, an elder member of the Hashimite clan, who seems to have been a man of outstanding ability and uncommon vigour and who held this responsible post with the full support of the Barmak ministers until their fall in 803. Two years after his appointment in 792, a revolution in Syria had necessitated the special delegation of Musa, the third son of Yahya ibn Barmak, as governor of that province, which he would seem however to have left as soon as the task of stamping out the trouble had been accomplished. The fomentors of this sedition—an affair of internal rivalries among the Arab clans represented in the army and the government rather than a rising against the Calif—were sent to Baghdad where, Harun having handed them over to Yahya to deal with, they were pardoned on giving security for their future good behaviour.

Nevertheless a more serious rising of the same kind disturbed the peace of Syria again in 796, and this time Ja'far ibn Yahya, specially selected to deal with it, managed so successfully to compose the differences of the warring factions without resort to military measures that Harun, as already noted, accorded him the unusual

honour of a royal and public reception on his return to Baghdad. The successful delegate was publicly praised and thanked by the Calif, who readily acceded to his request for the pardon of the misguided rebels. He shewed, however, an appreciation of the services rendered by Ja'far by nominating him to the governorship of Khurasan—a post of unusual difficulty and responsibility—but Ja'far never started on his new mission, being suddenly appointed to the office of Chief of Police at the capital, while Harthama was sent in his stead with secret orders to supersede 'Ali ibn 'Isa at Merv, which was then in some danger from the rebellious activities of Rafi' ibn Laith.

This 'Ali ibn 'Isa was of a family which had played an important part in the earliest days of the 'Abbasid movement ; and among the most signal services rendered by it to the 'Abbasid cause must be reckoned the purchase by one of 'Ali's ancestors for 400 pieces of silver of a slave named Abu Muslim, who in due course placed the first of the 'Abbasids on the throne and was executed by the second after saving him from the menace of a dangerous pretender. After the successful expedition

of Fadhl against Yahya ibn 'Abdullah, Harun had bethought himself of 'Ali ibn 'Isa as a suitable nominee to the important governorship of Khurasan and Transoxiana ; but Yahya ibn Khalid, when consulted in the matter, had counselled his sovereign against such an appointment. Harun had, however, insisted on sending 'Ali ; and three years later he had had the satisfaction of witnessing, with Yahya at his side, the arrival of a princely caravan with the first consignment of the proceeds of the new governor's administration of a distant and admittedly difficult province. In vain Yahya suggested that 'Ali's splendid remittance had probably been collected by tyrannous methods, which would inevitably produce a reaction in due course and which could in any case be applied in Baghdad itself with even better financial results if the Calif's only object was to amass wealth at any cost.

The fall of the Barmak family had deprived Harun of Yahya's counsel when complaints of 'Ali's harsh administration began to pour in from the Persian provinces. Harun, however, thought it time to make a personal inspection of the situation in that quarter, but, on his

arrival at Raiy early in 805, 'Ali again sought his favour by producing a vast treasure for the delectation of his sovereign as well as princely gifts to silence the horde of overlings and underlings that had accompanied the royal progress. Harun was successfully deceived and confirmed 'Ali in the government, whose functions he thus resumed with redoubled energy and oppressiveness. Not long afterwards, however, occurred the rising of Rafi' ibn Laith at Samarqand in consequence of orders for his arrest and execution issued by Harun to 'Ali. The latter's son, 'Isa, was sent to deal with the rebel but was slain, while the rising made sufficient headway to force 'Ali himself to retire temporarily to the safety of Merv, leaving behind a hidden hoard of 30 million pieces of silver amassed by 'Isa and secretly buried in his garden. This fact was known to none but one of his slave-girls, and she, on learning of the death of her master, informed her fellow-servants, who immediately divulged the secret to the people of Balkh. The latter not only possessed themselves of the treasure, but made the matter sufficiently public to reach the ears of Harun, who only thus, at

long last, became aware of the traitorous and oppressive conduct of the lieutenant on whom he had so fondly pinned his faith. 'Ali ibn 'Isa, his sons and his agents, were duly placed under arrest by Harthama amid the general rejoicings of the populace and sent in chains to Baghdad, whither, it is said, they were preceded by a caravan of 1500 camels carrying the surplus wealth amassed during the period of 'Ali's governorship, after full restitution had been made in accordance with Harun's orders to all who could produce reasonable proof of their claims against the officials of the government.

We may safely suppose that 'Ali ibn 'Isa met at Baghdad the usual fate of high officials deposed and convicted of maladministration and treason; but the immensity of the treasure collected by him and his officials from the distant provinces of the Persian borderland staggers the imagination, while the naïve insistence of Harun, in the instructions laid down by him for the guidance of Harthama, on the need for just and merciful dealings with the unfortunate people of those provinces, stands out in almost ludicrous con-

trast with his earlier satisfaction at receiving from 'Ali ibn 'Isa contributions to the Treasury on a scale that should at once have aroused the suspicions of any intelligent and well-meaning monarch. Yet he would not then listen to Yahya, who doubtless had, in his own methods and experience, the best of reasons for suspecting the probable source of such riches.

That Khurasan and the Trans-Oxus country were relatively wealthy and prosperous regions in comparison with the rest of the Calif's dominions may readily be admitted. But the limit of their taxable capacity must have fallen far short of the amounts contributed by them to the State Treasury and to the pockets of the officials of the Califate, if we are to take seriously the general revenue system inherited by the 'Abbasid rulers from the régime of the 'Orthodox Califs'—and notably of 'Umar ibn al Khattab, to whom most of the credit is due for a wise and reasonable basis of imperial taxation which has ever since, nominally at least, stood as a model for states professing the faith and principles of Islam. Unfortunately too many loopholes were

left by the Prophet and his immediate successors for the benefit of those that came after them with eloquent lip-service to their system, but with little enough will to be bound by its spirit if they could circumvent its letter without manifest scandal. It has already been suggested in these pages that too much latitude was left to the individuals responsible in each area for the assessment of the taxes payable by its inhabitants to the State. Such a fault is probably inevitable in any system dependent on an *ad valorem* basis which, other things being equal, is manifestly the fairest method in the common interests of the community and the individual. The weakness of such a method arises from the simple fact that other things never are and probably never can be equal. Nevertheless it will not be out of place to consider briefly here the general character of a fiscal system which originated in the sincere though perhaps Utopian atmosphere of 'Umar's Califate; which probably formed the conscious basis of the revenue system introduced and administered with the approval of the early 'Abbasid Califs by their Barmak advisers and ministers; and which, in later times, came

imperceptibly to be supplanted by the frankly infidel (or European) system of providing cloth according to the requirements of the coat.

The necessity of a fiscal system had been imposed very suddenly by the early Arab conquests on a semi-nomad community, which had been accustomed to nothing more elaborate than the maintenance of a patriarchal régime by reasonable contributions to a common pool. From this had arisen what may be regarded as a tithe principle, applied, with suitable modifications to meet each category of private wealth, to the produce of cultivated land, to the flocks and herds of the nomads and to merchandise imported into the main centres of population by the commercial community. But, now that the taxable area and population had so rapidly expanded by conquest, creating as they expanded ever greater requirements for the efficient maintenance of the conquering army and for the conduct of an imperial administration, the principle soon came to be recognised of a differentiation of burdens as between Muslims and the non-Muslim communities of the Empire. In essence,

the simple tithe system of the Prophet's time remained in force for the Muslims only, while the equally simple principle of the division of booty acquired in the course of ordinary Arab raiding was applied bodily to the immense proceeds of regular warfare as well as to such God-sent sources of incomes as mines, treasure-trove, fisheries, etc. Thus each Muslim—and that at first meant little more than each Arab—paid his modest contribution in produce-tithe or animal-taxes to the maintenance of the central authority and served without emoluments in the State army, while he received his share of four-fifths of all captured booty—the remaining fifth going, as it was put, to 'God and the Prophet,' or, in other words, to the central Treasury. Thus, as may be readily imagined, the Arab rapidly became rich to the ultimate detriment of his virtue.

Complications of the system soon began to arise. The infidel, conquered by Muslim arms, was given the choice of conversion or death, while death came in practice to be commuted to the payment of a poll-tax ranging from 12 to 48 *dirhams* according to the circumstances of the individual. Then again the

Muslim conquerors had claimed that the land wrested from the infidel enemy should be treated as part of the booty taken in war and distributed in the prescribed shares as between the Treasury and the troops. But 'Umar wisely regarded agricultural and other productive land as a capital asset belonging in theory not to the individual owner but to God —and therefore to the State. He refused, accordingly, to disturb the infidels in actual possession of the land, on the ground that they were requisite for its service and for the regular maintenance of its productivity both for their own subsistence and for the benefit of the State.

It was thus the Calif 'Umar who introduced, in respect of the lands confirmed in the possession of the conquered subject populations, the principle of a new tax called *Kharaj* or ' tribute ' —a land-tax payable in cash or kind as dictated by the special circumstances of each district. To facilitate the levy of this tax, he sent forth surveyors and assessors to make a complete cadastral survey of the Muslim Empire, which of course in those days scarcely extended beyond the limits of Syria and 'Iraq outside

Arabia proper. The cultivable area of the Empire was returned at approximately ten million acres, yielding a total annual land-tax (excluding the tithe-lands which comprised only the properties of the Arabs themselves and of those foreigners who had embraced Islam of their own free will) of over 128 million silver *dirhams* (about £5,000,000) according to one account, which apparently refers only to the rich, canal-irrigated province of 'Iraq. In the reign of Harun, however, it was estimated that the surplus revenue of the whole Empire (excluding, of course, the lost provinces of Africa and Spain), after meeting all the needs of the various provincial administrations, amounted to no less than 400 million *dirhams* (£16,000,000); and it was this sum that found its way annually to the Treasury at Baghdad, to finance the central imperial administration and to provide the generous largesse distributed at the Calif's pleasure to the poor and the professors.

That Harun took a keen interest in the financial administration of his realm cannot be doubted; and it was at his demand that the Chief Justice of the time, Abu Yusuf ibn

Ibrahim al Ansari—a friend of the great jurist Abu Hanifa—produced his famous treatise on the revenue of the Empire and the principles to be observed in collecting and disbursing it for the common benefit of all concerned. It is certain that, during the period that had elapsed since the simple and straightforward days of the Calif 'Umar, a great growth of unjust and irregular practices had taken root in the scattered revenue establishments of the Empire—to say nothing of the central finance ministry at Baghdad—and we hear frequently of investigations being set on foot to check the prevalent confusion and malpractices, which often resulted in such anomalies as the collection of the poll-tax from Muslims and the assessment of their lands to tribute rather than tithe. A great deal of the time, both of the Califs and of their ministers, must inevitably have been taken up in listening to petitions on such matters ; but it is at least creditable to the régime that, whatever may have been the shortcomings of individual governors and tax-collectors, no attempt was ever made by high authority to set aside the simple basis of revenue assessment and collection which 'Umar

had designed to fit the foundations left by the Prophet. There is indeed something altogether admirable in the unchallenged assumption of a reciprocal obligation of fair play as between the rulers and the ruled. Complaints of injustice could be subjected to a simple test and, however individuals in a position of authority might abuse the trust imposed upon them, the needs of the State were never and could never be made the excuse for over-taxation. The world has truly travelled far since those good old days, when the main preoccupations of the central Government were, on the one hand, to protect its subjects from the rapacity of its representatives, and, on the other, to protect itself from their malversation of its revenues.

Good old days they certainly were, with perhaps more shadow than light in the picture. The footlights of history, as recorded contemporaneously with the events of the time, shone full upon the Calif himself enthroned in the foreground amidst his courtiers and his ladies, but scarcely illumined the gloom of harassed populations and sulky provinces in the background, of which therefore we only

catch glimpses when they come forward in rebellion or serve more distantly to silhouette the activities of one or another of the chief characters on the stage. And of these, too, we get but a vague impression suggested implicitly by the reactions of the central figure to their comings and goings which, on a closer inspection and analysis, are found to constitute the more important part of the drama's movement, though its theme is the splendour of the Calif himself rather than the merits of his ministers.

We have seen how the Barmak family, coming on to the stage unostentatiously enough, occupied its centre for the greater part of the play to pass away into the wings suddenly and almost without noticeable effect on the development of the plot. A similar fate with similar results had attended important ministers in the reign of Harun's predecessors and, whatever may have been the merits or demerits of individual Califs or Wazirs, the Califate itself stands out as a theme of intrinsic importance. Even as the religion of the Prophet had taught the all-importance of the service and praise of God, even so did the political science of the

time concentrate on the glorification of the Califate as a worthy objective of individual and universal endeavour rather than on the perfection of the administrative machine as such for the benefit of all concerned. And for that reason, treason—commonly as it appears in the records of the 'Abbasid prime—was accepted without argument as the unforgiveable political sin, against which all the might and majesty of the Empire might be used—and was used so freely—regardless of any rottenness at the core which might have provoked it.

We have seen how 'Abdul Malik ibn Salih, an able and respected elder of the line of 'Abbas and a vigorous viceroy of the turbulent western provinces from 790 to 803, had buffooned it with Ja'far to obtain certain boons on which he had set his heart. His services to the Calif had counted for less towards the satisfaction of his modest ambitions than the intercession of a boon-companion of the Calif's revels. Such was the spirit of the times, and the great officers of the State did not kick unnecessarily against the pricks. For more than a decade 'Abdul Malik served the Calif loyally and

successfully. In 792 his son, 'Abdul Rahman, was despatched by him to invade Crete, and five years later he himself raided Asia Minor far and wide, reaching Angora while Harun in person took the field during the same operations. And so all went well enough until the fall of the Barmak family, which involved all whom they had befriended or encouraged in a common danger skilfully directed by the new Wazir, Fadhl ibn Rabi'.

'Abdul Malik himself was actually accused—apparently without reason—of having aimed at the Califate with the cognisance of the Barmak ministers. And—stranger still to relate—his own son, the same 'Abdul Rahman, was brought up against him together with a servant to bear witness to his treasonable designs. In vain did the accused viceroy protest that the pair were acting under the stimulus of the orders or inducements of an enemy ; but the Calif did not venture to the extreme limit of his absolute powers without more definite proof of the man's guilt ; and a message was sent to Yahya inviting him to confess his complicity in the plot on a tempting promise not only of the release of himself and his

family from prison, but actually of restoration to his former position. The promise may well have been no more than a ruse; but Yahya adhered firmly to his protestation of complete innocence of any treasonable intelligence with 'Abdul Malik in spite of Harun's threat to put his son, Fadhl, to death if he persisted in his obstinacy. In the end the Calif seems to have been satisfied that, whatever 'Abdul Malik might have been guilty of, the story linking him in his treason with the Barmak family had no basis of truth. At any rate Fadhl was spared and sent back to his father to live with the rest of the family under some sort of detention, it is true, but not exactly in prison —and with the solace of the presence of his mother and the other womenfolk and servants of Yahya's household. 'Abdul Malik was, however, cast into prison and so disappears from our ken.

The vacant viceroyalty of the West was now conferred on Qasim, one of Harun's sons; and the remaining years of the latter's reign were fully occupied with raids and counter-raids in Byzantine territory in consequence of a change of rulers at Constantinople. In 802 a revolu-

tion had unseated the Empress Irene and placed Nicephorus on the throne. The latter had immediately patched up an agreement with Charlemagne regarding the frontier to be observed between the two Christian Empires and, his rear thus secured against attack, he had lost no time in throwing down the gauntlet to Harun—denouncing the tribute which Irene had agreed to pay when she found herself in an embarrassing position of danger between the cross-fires of the Western Emperor and the Eastern Calif. Qasim, the new commander, had carried all before him, and Irene had not only agreed to pay the tribute but had released over 300 Muslim prisoners, whose return to the fold was celebrated with much jubilation.

The challenge of Nicephorus, following close upon this event, was immediately taken up by Harun, who led his army in person to Eregli, burning, slaying and destroying as he went. The Emperor, taken by surprise, agreed to resume the payment of tribute ; but Harun had no sooner reached Raqqa than Nicephorus, taking advantage of a particularly severe winter, broke the truce and withheld the tribute. This fact having been com-

municated to Harun incidentally in the course of a poem recited in his presence by way of lessening the shock, he immediately retraced his steps across the snow-bound passes of the Amanus and Taurus mountains. A desultory state of war continued throughout the years 804 and 805. And Nicephorus, at last awoken to a sense of the danger of provoking a powerful and vigorous enemy, agreed to pay the former tribute and to ransom Eregli itself for a large sum on the condition that it should never again be fortified. At the same time he craved the boon of a specified slave-girl in the town, whom he had promised in marriage to his son ; and Harun not only granted this request, but reacted generously to the new sense of peace between the two Empires by sending lavish gifts to the enemy he had before insulted with characteristic bluntness. The campaign had been long and ruthless, being marked apparently for the first time on record by mutual massacres of the Christian and Muslim populations in the theatre of war. And even the peace signed between the two monarchs did not put an end altogether to the old game of raid and counter-raid, as we

find Harthama in control of operations in Asia Minor in the following year (807), while Harun himself remained on the frontier watching events.

This was his last experience of actual warfare. Harthama, as we have seen already, was sent soon afterwards to tackle the rebellion of Rafi' ibn Laith in Transoxiana; and in due course Harun, with reinforcements in support of him, started on his last journey. Not far from his birthplace, and on or about the forty-sixth anniversary of his birthday, he was laid to rest in a grave of his own choosing in Persian soil. Like Greece of yore, Persia had triumphed over her conquerors, captivating the virile denizens of the Arabian desert with the seductive charms of her ancient civilisation and seducing them from the path of virtue with the Cornucopia of worldly vanities. To her victory none had contributed so generously as one who may perhaps be regarded as the last of the Arabian Califs, though he owed nothing but the religion, to which he was so deeply attached and which he served so loyally, to the land of his ancestors. By his last will and testament he ensured the collapse of the

edifice laboriously built up during two centuries since the passing of the Prophet. His son, Amin, would soon be called upon to defend himself against the brother to whom their father had bequeathed the Persian inheritance as an independent satrapy; and Mamun's generals would soon be shattering about his ears the triple walls of the City of Peace. And yet a little while later another son of Harun would fare forth seeking elsewhere a new home for the Califate, deserting the ruins of Baghdad. The Arab would then slink back into his deserts; but he would never, could never forget—and he would yet come back.

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